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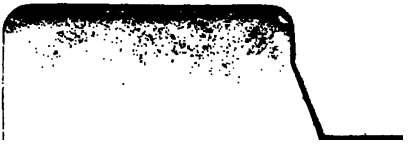

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MARY OF BURGUNDY;

OR,

THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"PHILIP AUGUSTUS," "HENRY MASTERTON," &c.

Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly
That thou wouldst holily; wouldst not play false
And yet wouldst wrongly win."—*Macbeth.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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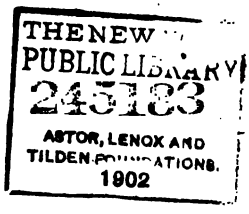
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MARY OF BURGUNDY;

OR,

THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

CHAPTER I.

We shall pass over the forenoon of the following day rapidly. The news of her father's death reached Mary of Burgundy early in the morning; and though she wept long and bitterly, her grief was now more calm and tranquil than it had been while uncertainty remained mingled with sorrow. More agitating tidings, however, had reached the Lord of Imbercourt and the Chancellor Hugonet, at a still earlier hour; for, by daybreak, the first rumours of the disarming of the soldiery, and the seizure of the gates and walls of the city by the burgher guard, had been communicated to them; and before they could take any measures in consequence, the painful fact that every post or defence in Ghent was in the hands of the citizens had been reported from all quarters. Respect for the grief of the princess caused them to withhold from her, for some hours, the knowledge which they themselves possessed of the state of the city; and it was only when, by means of some other private agents, they received information that the principal burghers of the town had assembled in the town-house, and were voting a petition to the princess, praying a restitution of all those rights and privileges of which they had been deprived by the Duke Charles, that they found it absolutely necessary to communicate to her both what had occurred and what was likely to follow.

The news affected Mary of Burgundy less than they had expected; and, indeed, proved only a sufficient stim-

ulus to rouse her from the grief into which she had fallen.

"Fear not, my Lord of Imbercourt," she said, as she saw the apprehension that overshadowed his countenance; "fear not, I will soon find means to quiet and satisfy the good people of Ghent. It was only while the will and ordinances of my father were opposed to my own inclinations, that I found any difficulty, or entertained any fear, in regard to the tranquillity of the state."

"I hope, madam, and I trust," replied Imbercourt, "that you may find it easy; but a stirred-up population is like one of those ravenous beasts that seem to acquire a greater appetite by feeding largely. I trust that the Lords of Ravestein and Cleves, with others to whom I have despatched messengers, may soon arrive, and in sufficient force to overawe these insolent burghers; so that you may be obliged to grant nothing but that which is just and right, and be able to check concession at the proper point.—Hark, lady!" he added, as a distant shout burst upon his ear, "the unmanly brutes allow you not one day for sorrow: they are coming even now."

Mary's cheek turned a little pale; but she showed no other sign of apprehension; and merely replied, "Let them come, my lord; they shall find it difficult to conquer the love of Mary of Burgundy; for love is the only arms that I shall oppose to my subjects. Alas! that they should ever be mine!—I beseech you, my good lords, to have the hall of audience fittingly prepared to receive the people, who seem approaching fast. Have such guards and attendants drawn up as may give us some show of state. Alice, my sweet friend, seek out the noble duchess, and pray her to cast by her grief for a moment; for much do I need her presence and support in what is about to occur."

The orders of the princess were promptly obeyed. Margaret of York joined her in a few minutes. The hall of audience was prepared as speedily as possible; and every thing was ready for the reception of the burghers before they reached the gates of the palace.

The deputation, consisting of about twenty persons, dressed in their municipal robes, proceeded from the town-house on foot, followed and surrounded by an immense multitude of the lower orders, shouting loudly, "Ghent and liberty! Ghent and liberty! Long live the noble Syndics." They soon arrived at the building

called the *Cours du Prince;* and some surprise, perhaps, was felt by the citizens, on finding themselves at once admitted to the palace, without any question, and ushered through a line of armed guards, to the great hall of audience. The general impression among them was, that the counsellors of the princess, possessing a greater armed force than the townsmen had been aware of, were determined to bring the matter to an immediate decision; and perhaps even to arrest them in the palace, for the events of the night before. This supposition was rather increased by the appearance of the hall of audience, which was also lined with armed attendants; and by the demeanour of Imbercourt, Hugonet, and other counsellors, who stood with somewhat severe and frowning countenances on each side of the chair of state, which now remained vacant, under the rich crimson canopy that had so often overhung the stern determined features of Charles the Bold.

As soon as they had entered the chamber, the deputation paused, uncertain to whom to address themselves. The counsellors neither spoke nor changed their position; and for a few moments there was a dead, unpleasant silence, which no one chose to break. At that moment, however, when the dumb confronting of the court and the citizens was becoming even painful to both, the door by the side of the throne was thrown open by one of the huissiers or door-keepers, and Mary of Burgundy, leaning on the arm of Margaret of York, preceded by some of the officers of the palace, and followed by two or three female attendants, entered the apartment, and advanced towards the chair. She ascended the steps on which it was raised, but did not sit down; and turning towards the deputation of the burghers, she bowed her head with a gentle inclination, while the novelty of her situation, the feeling that she was taking possession of her dead father's throne, and the difficulty of her circumstances, overcame her firmness for an instant, and she burst into tears.

She wiped the drops rapidly from her eyes, and made a sign to the Chancellor Hugonet, who immediately took a step forward, and said—addressing the deputation of citizens, who still stood at the further end of the room—"The high and mighty princess, Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, Countess of Flanders and Hainault, is ready to receive any persons on behalf of her good town of Ghent."

There was a slight pause; and then Albert Maurice, as president of the provisional council, advanced towards the throne, and knelt on one knee upon the first step. Mary extended her fair hand to him, as he knelt, and, with a flushed cheek and quivering lip, the young burgher bent his head over it, while something very like a tear glittered in his eye, too. In his left hand he held a roll of parchment; and, before he rose, he said, "Madam, I come to lay at your feet an humble address of condolence, and petition, from your good and faithful subjects, the citizens of Ghent. Is it your good pleasure that I read it?"

Mary bowed her head; and Albert Maurice, rising from his knee, unrolled the parchment which he held, and read, in gentle and respectful tones, the address which had that morning been agreed to in the town-hall. The terms in which it was couched were as mild and moderate as the young burgher, by his utmost eloquence, had been able to procure. The citizens, in the language of grief and respect, spoke of the high qualities of the late Duke of Burgundy; and touched as lightly as possible upon those acts of arbitrary power and barbarous harshness, which had deprived him of that love which the more noble and generous parts of his character might have obtained from his subjects. They continued, however, to notice his attacks upon the liberties of the good towns of Flanders, in terms both severe and firm; and they petitioned the princess immediately to take into consideration the consequences which such aggressions had produced, and to remedy the wrong that had been done by her father.

While Albert Maurice read the petition, the deputation had gradually advanced, and formed a little semicircle at a few yards' distance from the throne; and when the young citizen had concluded, the princess immediately replied, addressing herself to all,—

"I did think, my good friends," she said, in a tone rather sad than reproachful, "that the day on which I first heard the sad news of my poor father's death might have been passed in privacy, sanctified to mourning and to sorrow. I know, however, that communities are little capable of feeling for the griefs and affections of individuals, especially when those individuals are their princes; and, therefore, laying by my sorrow, I come willingly to hear your wants and wishes, and to

assure you all of my firm resolve to do every thing I can to satisfy and to make you happy. In regard to the rights and privileges of the city of Ghent, far be it from me, now or ever, to inquire why they were restrained or abridged by your late sovereign lord, my father; or to renew old griefs and dissensions, by investigating who was right or wrong in the times past. Me, men of Ghent, ye have never yet offended: ye are my fellow-countrymen, therefore I feel for you; ye are my subjects, therefore I love you. At once, then, whether as a boon, or as a right—whether as your own due, or as a testimony of the affection of Mary of Burgundy—take, hold, and use wisely all those privileges and immunities whatever which ye can prove that ye have possessed at any time within fifty years of the present day. Farther back let us not inquire, for it would lead us to times when Ghent and Flanders, under the usurped domination of a man who was raised from the dregs of the people, by the people's discontent, endured a grosser and more bloody tyranny than ever they suffered from the most savage and cruel of their native princes."

"We thankfully accept your grace's bounty," replied Albert Maurice; "and, without derogating from our own inherent rights, we willingly receive your free and generous confirmation of them, as a grace and benefit conferred; and so humbly take our leave."

"You will confer, my friends," said Mary, "with my chancellor here present, in regard to all the particulars which you may claim, and will have them clearly established and defined to the full extent of the words that I have used."

The deputation were then permitted to kiss the hand of the princess, and withdrew; and Mary, after giving one hasty glance round the hall of audience, retired, once more to indulge her grief in her own apartments.

With her, and with the Duchess of York, the hours passed in lonely mourning, only interrupted from time to time by an occasional call to transact some of the necessary business of the state, or by the tidings of some event which it was thought indispensable to communicate. In the streets and lanes of the city, however, the day went by with all those signs which show an anxious and excited population. Continual crowds collected in various parts of the town; now conversing

among themselves, now listening to some popular declaimer. The busy and important were seen hurrying to and fro in every direction. The song, the fiddle, or the *cornemuse* were exchanged for pitiable verses on the pitiable battle of Nancy; and while one part of the city was overflowing with people, and rang with the sound of many tongues, another showed streets totally deserted, the abode of silence and solitude. At length, towards evening, a strong disposition to riot and tumult displayed itself. Whispers and rumors, originating no one knew where, were spread rapidly among the crowd, tending strongly to excite them to outrage. Some said that the council were bringing in large bodies of soldiers; some that the nobles were arming their attendants, and intended to repossess themselves of the gates. But the strongest and most generally credited reports were directed against the eschevins, or police magistrates of the city, whose very duties of investigation and punishment rendered them at all times obnoxious to the lower classes, but who were now hated in a tenfold degree, from the abrogation of the popular form of election in their last appointment. In several districts petty tumults actually took place: whoever bore the appearance of either a noble or a lawyer was insulted as soon as he appeared; and the burgher guard, which was more than once called out, with a very natural leaning to the people from which it was selected, took merely such means of repression as dispersed the crowds in one spot, only to collect in larger numbers in another.

In the mean while, Maillotin du Bac, as prévôt, and the druggist Ganay, as one of the notables of the town, mingled with the crowds, and harangued them with the apparent purpose of persuading them to return peaceably to their houses. The first, indeed, was any thing but popular in the city; and some supposed that he was exposing himself to outrage by the active part he took; but it was wonderful to see how readily he assumed the tone and deportment necessary to captivate the people, and how speedily the multitude forgot his former conduct. It is true that neither he nor Ganay in their speeches said one word to appease the current of popular indignation, or to divert it from the point to which it was tending. They used every sort of commonplace argument to induce the people to return to their own dwellings. They told them that it would be much better,

much safer, much more prudent, to disperse, and to let things take their course; though they acknowledged, at the same time, that the eschevins, in the discharge of their illegal office, had acted cruelly and basely. Nevertheless, they said, that those instruments of tyranny would doubtless be brought to justice, if they were not by any means smuggled out of the city. In short, they did what may always be done—excited the people in a far greater degree, while they affected to tranquillize them; and pointed their fury to the very object from which they pretended to turn it.

The troops which remained in the town, though totally insufficient to overawe the citizens, or to repossess themselves of the walls and gates, were numerous enough to hold out, for any length of time, the palace or Cours du Prince, as it was called, which, according to the custom of the day, was strongly fortified; and which was, luckily, full provisioned. The attention, therefore, of the ministers of the orphan princess was solely directed to adding temporary defences to her dwelling, and to repairing any slight defect which time or oversight had produced, without attempting the vain task of putting down the turbulent spirit which was manifesting itself in the city. No hostility, indeed, was evinced by the populace towards the princess or her attendants; and servants were suffered to go to and from the palace without the slightest molestation. But still the tidings of tumultuous movements, in various parts of the town, poured in through the evening; and the distant shouts and cries caught the ear of Mary herself, and more than once made her inquire the cause. Towards nightfall Imbercourt was summoned to her presence, and she asked eagerly if there were no means of pacifying the people.

"None, madam," replied the minister; "without, indeed, you could bribe some of their demagogues; and that would, of course, be merely hiring them to create tumults hereafter, whenever they wanted a fresh supply. I am afraid they must be suffered to have their way for a time. In the end the people will see their own folly, and the base selfishness of those that mislead them, and will return to quiet and tranquillity of their own accord. In the mean while, thank God, the palace is secure; so be under no apprehensions, madam, for we could hold it out for six months against any force they can bring."

"Oh, I fear not for myself, my lord," replied Mary; "I fear for my subjects and my friends. I beseech you, my lord, leave not the palace to-night: they might murder you in the way to your own hotel."

"I do not believe, madam, that they have any ill-will towards me," replied Imbercourt: "I have never done them wrong; and have often stood between them and the anger of their prince. But my duty commands me to remain here, at least till the town is somewhat more calm; and I certainly shall not quit the palace this night."

So saying, he withdrew; and Mary approached the lattice of the room in which she had been sitting, and which commanded a somewhat extensive view over the city; though the objects that were to be seen were more the roofs of buildings and the spires of churches than the busy multitude which she would fain have watched, herself unseen. Every now and then, however, a glance was to be caught of some of the manifold canals and squares of Ghent; and Mary threw open the window to see if, ere the light faded away entirely, she could gain a view of any of the crowds whose shouts she heard. But her effort was in vain; and turning away from the chilling blast of the January wind, she closed the window, and was returning to her seat, when she found that Alice of Imbercourt had followed her to the deep arch in which the casement was situated.

"I wish, dearest lady," said her fair follower, "that you would take the counsel of a simple girl, which, I have a great belief, would be better than that of all those grave signiors."

"Well, my Alice," replied the princess, with a faint smile, "what would you have me do?"

"May I speak boldly, lady?" demanded Alice.

"Ay, indeed, as boldly as you will," said Mary, whose heart wanted some bosom into which to pour its anxieties and sorrows. "But first, dear friend, send away those two girls who sit moping by the fire, sharing my distress without feeling my grief. Bid the page go light the lamps in the other chamber; and tell them to take thither their embroidery frames, and work diligently, while we stay here in the gray twilight, as dim and melancholy as my thoughts."

Her commands were speedily obeyed. "And now, Alice," she said, as the other returned, "what would you have me do?"

"I would have you despatch a messenger this very night," replied the young lady, boldly, "to the only person to whose arm and to whose heart you could confide to defend and guard you in the present strait—I mean to the Arch——"

"Hush, hush! Not for the universe!" cried Mary. "Good God! what would he deem me? No, Alice, no! you would surely never advise me to such a step. Fy! fy! mention it not!"

"I knew that you would start away, my dearest mistress," replied her fair counseller; "but you must hear me still. What can you do better? What can you do so well? The circumstances in which you are placed—the difficulties which surround you—do they not justify such an act? do they not render it wise and right, instead of indelicate and bold? The Archduke Maximilian was once plighted to you by your own father; and if ever two people loved each other—"

"Hush, hush! Alice, I entreat, I command," interrupted the princess. "It must not, it cannot be. If such be all your advice, speak no more; what I wanted was counsel, how to tranquillize these unquiet people of Ghent."

"I had something to say on that score, too," replied Alice of Imbercourt; "but, perchance, my advice will not be more palatable to you, in regard to that matter, than in regard to the other."

"Nay, nay, be not offended, Alice," replied Mary; "none can judge of that on which you were speaking but myself; but, of this business of Ghent perhaps any one can judge better."

"Well, then, madam, I will say my say," replied Alice; "and you can follow my counsel or not, as you think best. You saw the young burgher, with the furred robe and the gold chain, who read you the address this morning—you must remember him—as handsome a youth as ever lady's eye rested on."

"I scarcely saw him," replied the princess; "nor should have noticed him at all, but that I think it was the same who, some three or four months since, was accused before the council of high-treason, and acquitted himself most nobly."

"The same, exactly the same," replied Alice: "his name is Albert Maurice, as I hear; and he bears the noblest reputation of any young citizen of them all.

I have heard even my own father declare, that yon young man has too high a mind, and too noble a spirit, for his class and station."

"Well, what of him?" demanded the princess; "I fear me that this noble spirit will work us little good; for, from all I saw to-day, he seems to lead the disaffected of the city."

"You marked him not as I did, madam," replied Alice: "never mind what I saw, or what I fancied that I saw. He does lead all parties in the city, I hear; and I am fain to think, that had it not been for him, that petition and address, as they call it, would have had a ruder tone. Lady, that young man is well disposed towards you and yours; and I believe that he might be easily worked upon to use his great influence to cure the present madness of the people."

"Indeed, I believe he is well disposed," replied Mary; "for I remember, by your father's counsel, I had him called back after the trial, and besought him, in private, to do his best to maintain peace and order in the city."

"My father's counsel was wise, madam," replied Alice, with a quiet smile; "and his daughter's is just of the same piece. What I would have you do now, is what my father led you to do then. Send for this Albert Maurice, and beseech him, fairly and gently, to do his best to quiet the populace, and to restore tranquillity. Appeal to his generosity—to his gratitude; show him how frankly you granted the petition of the citizens this morning; and, take my word, you will make a convert and a powerful friend."

"With all my heart," replied Mary, at once; "but there is no time to be lost: hie thee down to thy father, dear Alice; and tell him what I have resolved to do, and bid him send a messenger for the young citizen directly."

"Nay, nay, dear lady," answered Alice, smiling again, "that way will never do. In the first place, I hear my father is not, just now, the best beloved in the city, for suffering a young man to be executed who had committed murder, and was condemned by the eschevins; and, besides that, I learned from one of my women but now, that my father had sent, in his own name, to this Albert Maurice and another of the citizens, named Ganay, and that they refused to come."

"Then, most probably, they would refuse me too," replied the princess; "and though Mary of Burgundy will do all that she can to make her people happy, she must not stoop to beg their presence, and be refused."

"No fear, no fear, madam," replied Alice; "but leave the matter to me, and I will answer for it, that, ere half an hour be over, the young citizen shall be standing here before you."

"What do you propose to do, then?" demanded the princess.

"Merely to write a billet, desiring Master Albert Maurice, in the name of Mary Duchess of Burgundy, to render himself to the palace, with all speed, in order to speak with his sovereign."

"Nay, but it may seem strange," said the princess; "I hardly dare do so without speaking with your father."

"If you do, lady," replied Alice, "all our scheme fails, or worse may come of it than you suspect. I have already heard the constable of the reiters and one of your grace's council regretting that they did not seize upon the deputation this morning, as a pledge for the submission of the people. No, no; he must come in disguise, and must go in disguise. I will send the page with the billet; he is shrewd and active, and shall bring him in by the postern, on the canal. Nay, nay, lady," she added, seeing Mary about to make some farther opposition, "I will take it all upon myself. I will write the note and send the page, and bid the sentry give him admission on his return: and if aught is heard of it, it will but pass for the trick of a mad-headed girl; and I have more to lose than you, too," she continued, laughing; "for I have a lover who could be as jealous as a spaniel dog, if I chose to let him."

The princess still hesitated, and probably might have refused her consent; but some nearer and louder shouts met her ear, giving evidence that the crowds were increasing as the night came on, and determined her to accede. Alice's proposal was agreed to accordingly; and, as every moment was apparently adding to the tumult in the city, she proceeded to put it in execution immediately.

CHAPTER II.

THE torrent of business in which Albert Maurice found himself involved occupied his time in such a manner as hardly to permit of his giving much attention to the tumultuous assemblages which took place during the day in various parts of the city. Popular leaders, indeed, are apt to attach too little importance to those commotions which, being frequently raised by themselves with ease and rapidity, they fancy they can allay with the same facility and power. Towards two o'clock the young citizen had addressed the people in the market-place, and had easily induced them to disperse, by informing them that the princess had most generously granted them, of her own accord, all that they could desire. He had then—in the belief that all the other crowds would melt away in the same manner, before night—retired to his own dwelling; and in the most remote and noiseless apartment which it contained had proceeded to make, with rapidity and decision, all those arrangements on which depended the defence of the city against external enemies, and the predominance of the popular party within its walls. He wrote instantly to all the municipal councils of the various towns in Flanders; he took measures for organizing a considerable national force; he sent express orders to all the gates to refuse admission to any party of armed men; and he issued orders for the fabrication of arms as speedily as possible, in order that the citizens might be in a state of preparation, in case the privileges and liberty they had regained should be menaced from without.

Thus passed the three hours of light that remained after his return home: and busy hours they were. At length, feeling himself, notwithstanding his great corporeal powers, somewhat wearied with the immense exertions which he had made, he proceeded into the garden attached to his dwelling, which formed a little terrace on the banks of the Lys. As he stood there, turning his aching brow to the cool wind, the full roar

of the tumult in the city burst upon his ear; and, after listening for a few moments to the combination of discordant sounds, which rose up from the many streets and squares, he saw at once that some great change had taken place in the popular mind since he had left them in the great market-place; and, turning quickly back, he prepared to go forth and use all the power he knew that he possessed to restore tranquillity.

At his own door, however, he was met by a boy, who instantly pronounced his name, and demanded to speak with him.

"Who, and what are you, boy?" demanded the young citizen.

"I bear you a billet from a lady," replied the youth; "and you must read it directly."

"A billet from a lady!" cried Albert Maurice, with a sneer curling his handsome lip; "go, go, my boy, this is no time for idle gallantries. Give me the note, and get thee hence; I will read it to-morrow."

"Nay, but you must read it this moment," the other replied, without giving him the note: "ay, and that in private too," he added. "So come, good sir, go back into your house, and take it with reverence and care, for it deserves no less."

"Thou art bold enough," replied Albert Maurice; but at the same time there was something in the deportment of the boy so unlike that of the common *love's messengers* of those days, that he yielded to his desire; and turning back into the house, strode quickly to the chamber in which he had been writing, and in which a light was still burning.

The moment he had entered, the apparel of the page, and a small St. Andrew's cross embroidered on his left breast, at once showed him that he was a servant of the house of Burgundy. Instantly closing the door, Albert Maurice took the note with every sign of reverence and respect, and read it over attentively by the light of the lamp. As he did so, however, his cheek flushed, and then turned pale, and flushed again, and he demanded eagerly, "Who gave you this note, sir page?"—"The Lady Alice of Imbercourt," replied the boy; "and she bade me lead you speedily to the postern on the river."

Albert Maurice paused, and mused; and though no heart that ever beat in a human bosom knew less of fear than his, yet the ordinary calculation of danger

which every one makes when engaged in enterprises of importance forced itself upon his notice, and he could not but feel that the step proposed to him was replete with peril. Was it probable, he asked himself, that the princess should send to him at that hour? And was not the note he held in his hand much more likely to be part of a scheme framed by the prévôt, or some of the inferior agents of the government, in order to get the chief leader of the popular party—the president of the provisional council—into their hands, as a tie upon the people?

Yet, as he gazed upon the billet, it was evidently a woman's writing; and as he re-read the contents there was something in it all which put prudence and caution to flight at once. Was not the very name of Mary of Burgundy enough? To be requested by her to visit her dwelling in secrecy and disguise!—to see her, to speak with her in private!—to bask in the light of those beautiful eyes!—to hear that soft and thrilling voice!—the very hope was worth all the perils that ever knight or paladin encountered; and his re-perusal of the billet determined him at once to go. Where to find some speedy means of disguising his person was his next thought; but then, immediately remembering the gray monk's gown in which he had already travelled so far, and which, by some accident, had been left behind by his former guide, he instantly sought it out,—stripped off the furred robe which he had worn through the day,—and buckling on a sword and poniard under the frock, strode on after the page with that increased feeling of security which we all experience when we know that we have the means about us of selling our lives dearly, happen what will in the course before us.

"Better follow at a short distance behind, good father," said the boy, as they proceeded into the street; "you know your way towards the back of the Cours du Prince. If we go separate, we shall the better escape notice, and you will find me on the narrow path beneath the walls."

As he spoke thus, he darted away, and Albert Maurice followed with the hurried step of excitement and expectation. It was now completely dark; and passing onward along the quay of the canals, and through one or two of the many large squares of Ghent, he soon saw enough of popular feeling to make him hurry his

steps, anxious to resume a garb in which he might take measures for repressing the turbulent spirit that was every moment gaining ground. At the corner of each of the larger streets immense bonfires, blazing and crackling in the frosty air, at once lighted, and warmed, and excited the multitudes that assembled round them. But this was not all; wine and ale too, that genuine Flemish beverage, were circulating rapidly among the crowds of men and women, whose class and appearance did not at all warrant the supposition that their own means could procure, even on an extraordinary occasion, such copious supplies of dear and intoxicating liquors. All this excited a suspicion in the mind of Albert Maurice that some unseen agency was at work to rouse the people to a far higher pitch than he wished or expected; and, at the same time, he felt that such scenes of tumultuous rejoicing on the news of the loss of a great battle, and the death of their bold and chivalrous sovereign, was indecent in itself, and must be bitter indeed to the child of the dead prince. Such sights of course increased his speed; and hastening on as fast as possible, he soon found himself upon the narrow ledge of land between the fortified wall of the palace and the river. But he was alone—the page was nowhere to be seen, and Albert Maurice began to suspect he had been deceived; but a moment after, the appearance of the boy, hurrying up as fast as his less powerful limbs permitted, soon showed him that his own anxious haste had outstripped even the page's youthful activity.

Although a sentry paraded the wall above, with his slow-match lighted, no challenge was given; and three sharp taps upon the postern door soon caused it to fly open, and admit them within the walls of the building. An inferior officer of the guard stood by, and held a lantern to the face of the page as he entered. The boy endured his scrutiny quietly; but, to the surprise of the young citizen, he found that the appearance of the page was received as a passport for himself. The officer withdrew the lantern without further comment, as soon as he had satisfied himself of the boy's identity, and suffered Albert Maurice and his conductor to enter the palace.

Up long and manifold staircases, through innumerable doors and interminable passages, the page led the leader of the Gandois, and only stopped at length, when both

were out of breath, at a small, deep doorway, where he knocked before he entered, making a sign to Albert Maurice to pause. The boy was then told to come in, and remained within for some minutes, while the young burgher continued in the dark passage—his heart beating with that thrill of expectation, as he thought of his near meeting with Mary of Burgundy, which would seem to partake of the nature of fear, were it not almost always mingled in some way with feelings, not only of hope, but of joy.

After a time the boy returned; and leading the young burgher to another door, threw it open, and admitted him into an apartment fitted up with all the ostentatious splendour for which Charles of Burgundy had been famous in the decoration of his palaces. It seemed to have been a room peculiarly allotted to that prince's leisure moments; for all around hung various implements of sylvan sport, each ornamented in some way with the arms of Burgundy, and piled up against the walls in the manner of trophies.

There is something strangely solemn in entering the chamber of one lately dead. It seems more empty—more vacant and cold than when its master, though absent, is living. It appeals to our own feelings, and connects itself—by the thin gossamer threads of selfishness which the human heart draws between our own fate and every external event that befalls our fellow-men—with an after-period, when our chamber shall be left thus cold and lonely, and our place be no longer found among the living.

All spoke of the last Duke Charles, and of the bold rude sports of which he had been fond. Even the sconce that held a few lighted tapers was fashioned in the shape of a boar's head; and as the young citizen entered the chamber, he felt that feeling of pity for, and sympathy with, the deceased prince which nothing could have inspired but his death—that common fate which breaks down all that holds man from man, and first makes us feel our near kindred to each other.

There was no one in the chamber; and the page, after telling Albert Maurice that the lady would be with him in a moment, retired, and left him to think both of the living and the dead. His thoughts of the latter, however, soon ceased; for in this active life the solemn impressions are naturally the most transitory; and the

expectation of meeting Mary of Burgundy soon absorbed the whole. He had no time to analyze his feelings, or to examine with microscopic accuracy the workings of his own heart. Since the day he had first seen her in the market-place, her image had become connected with almost every thought that had passed through his mind. The name of the princess, and her conduct in all the events of the day, of course formed a constant part in the conversation of the people; and whenever she was mentioned, the fair form and the mild liquid eye rose to the sight of the young burgher; and the sweet melodious tones of her voice seemed to warble in his ear. He had refused to suffer his own mind to inquire what was going on in his bosom; but the words of Ganay had perhaps, in some degree, opened his eyes to his own feelings, and the sensations which he experienced while waiting her coming in that chamber tended still more to undeceive him. "What, what was he doing?" he asked himself: encouraging a passion for an object beyond his reach. But even while he so thought, a thousand wild and whirling images rushed across his brain—of triumph, and success, and love. But how was it all to be obtained?—by overthrowing her power to raise himself into her rank,—by overturning the institutions of his country,—by risking the effusion of oceans of blood, and by inducing months of anarchy?—Still this was the only means by which he could ever hope to win the hand of Mary of Burgundy; and he asked himself, would such means win her love?—even were he to give way to the towering ambition which was the only passion that had hitherto struggled with patriotism in his bosom, would it obtain the gratification of that love which was now rising up, a stronger passion still, destined to use the two others as its mere slaves?

Such feelings, as I have said, rushed rapidly through his brain, while expectation mingled with the rest, and made his heart beat till it almost caused him to gasp for breath. These sensations were becoming almost intolerable, when the door opened, and Mary of Burgundy, followed a step behind by Alice of Imbercourt, entered the apartment, and the door was closed. The princess was still pale with grief; but there was a fitful colour came and went in her cheek that was far lovelier than the most rosy health. Her eyes, too, bore the traces of tears; but their heaviness had something touching in it,

which, perhaps, went more directly to the heart than their brighter light.

With a flushed cheek and agitated frame the young burgher advanced a step, and made a profound inclination of the head as Mary entered, not well knowing whether, when received in so private a manner, to kneel or not; but Mary, after pausing a moment, with a doubtful glance, as her eye fell upon the monk's frock with which he was covered, held out her hand for him to kiss as her subject—a custom then common to almost all ladies of sovereign station, and the young citizen at once bent one knee, and touched that fair hand, with a lip that quivered like that of a frightened child. He then rose, and stepping back, waited for Mary to express her commands, though his eye from time to time was raised for a single instant to her face, as if he thought to impress those fair features still more deeply on the tablet of his heart.

"I thank you, sir, for coming so speedily," said the princess; "for, in truth, I have much need of your counsel and assistance."

"I trust, madam, you could not entertain a doubt of my instant obedience to your commands," replied Albert Maurice, finding that she paused.

"The only thing which could have led me to do so," replied the princess, "was your refusal to come at the bidding of my faithful friends, the Lords of Imbercourt and Hugonet."

"There is some great mistake, madam," replied the young citizen, in surprise; "the noblemen to whom your grace refers have never signified any wish to see me. Had they done so, I should have come at their request with the same confidence that I have obeyed your commands."

"Alice," said the princess, turning to her fair attendant, "my information came from you; I hope it was correct."

"All I can say, fair sir," said Alice of Imbercourt, advancing a step, and applying to the young burgher the term that was generally used in that day, from noble to noble,—"all I can say, fair sir, is, that I heard my father, the Lord of Imbercourt, despatch a messenger this day, at about four of the clock, to entreat Master Albert Maurice and Master Walter Ganay to visit him at the palace immediately. And I heard, scarcely an

hour ago, by the report of one of my women, that a direct refusal had been returned."

"Not by me, lady, certainly not by me," replied Albert Maurice. "Since the hour of two, this day, I have been in my own cabinet busily engaged in writing, and know but little of what has passed in the city. But certainly no messenger has ever reached me to-day from the palace, except the page who brought me the command which I am here to obey. But you say another name was coupled with mine. Perhaps that person may have returned the uncourteous refusal of which you speak."

"I am very sorry for it, then," answered Mary of Burgundy; "for the matter on which I desired to see you, sir, would be much better transacted with men and statesmen than with a weak woman like myself."

"Your pardon, madam!" replied Albert Maurice. "If what you would say refers to the city of Ghent and its present state, much more may be done by your own commands, expressed personally to myself, than by an oration of the wisest minister that ever yet was born. Statesmen, madam, are often too cold, too prudent, too cautious, to deal with the frank multitude, whose actions are all passion, and whose motives are all impulse. But, oh! madam, there is a natural, generous, gentle feeling about all your demeanour, from your lightest word to your most important deed, which is well calculated to make our hearts serve you, as well as our heads or our hands."

The young burgher spoke with a fervour and an enthusiasm that called the blood up for a moment into Mary's cheek. But as the chivalrous courtesy of the day often prompted expressions of much more romantic admiration, without the slightest further meaning than mere ordinary civility, Mary of Burgundy saw nothing in the conduct of the young citizen beyond dutiful and loyal affection. The possibility of her having raised a deeper or more tender feeling in the bosom of her subject never once crossed her thoughts. It was to her as a thing impossible; and, though she certainly felt gratified by the fervent tone of loyalty in which Albert Maurice expressed himself, she dreamed not for a moment that that loyalty could ever become a more individual feeling.

"I trust, sir," she replied, "ever to merit the opinion you have expressed, and to keep the love of my good

people of Ghent, as well as that of all my subjects. But, indeed, the conduct that they are now pursuing evinces but small regard either for my feelings or my interest, nor much gratitude for the first willing concession that I have made in their favour. You say, sir, you know little that has passed in the city since an early hour; listen, then, to the tidings that have reached me."

Mary then recapitulated all that she had heard concerning the tumults in different parts of the city; and a conversation of considerable length ensued, which,—from all the important and interesting circumstances discussed, from the free and unceremonious communication which it rendered necessary, and from the continual bursts of high and generous feelings, upon both parts, to which the great events they spoke of gave rise,—brought all the sentiments of the young citizen within the circle of the one deep, overpowering passion which had been long growing up in his bosom. If he came there doubting whether he loved Mary of Burgundy, before he left her presence his only doubt was whether there was any thing else on earth worth living for but the love he felt towards her.

Such feelings had their natural effect both on his appearance and demeanour. He still maintained that tone of deep respect due from a subject to his sovereign; but there was a brilliant energy in all he said, a spirit of gentle, chivalrous loyalty in all his professions, inspired by the great excitement under which he spoke, that raised the wonder and admiration of Mary herself, though still no one dream of bolder aspirations ever crossed her imagination.

The chamber in which this conference was held was turned towards the river, rather than to the square before the palace; and the shouts which had made themselves loudly audible in the apartments from which Mary had just come had hitherto been less distinctly heard where she now stood. But in a moment after, the multitudes which had assembled in other places seemed directing their course over a bridge, which lay a little higher up the stream; and the sounds came with redoubled force. Shouts, cries, and songs of every kind were borne along with the wind, to the chamber in which the princess was standing; and, pointing to the casement, she bade

the young citizen open it, and listen himself to what was passing without.

Albert Maurice did so, and, in listening, his cheek became alternately pale and red, his brow knitted, and his eye flashed; and, turning to the princess, he replied, "I know not, madam, what they have done, or what they are about to do, but certainly some sort of insanity seems to have seized upon the people. However, I will this instant go forth, and, as I live, if they have committed the crimes of which I fear they are guilty, from some of the cries I have just heard, the perpetrators shall meet the punishment they deserve."

He turned towards the door as he spoke, but Mary desired him to pause. "Stay, stay, sir, a moment," she said: "Alice, bid the page see that the way is clear."

The young lady opened the door, and whispered a few words to the boy, who waited in the passage beyond, and who instantly proceeded to ascertain that no change had taken place to obstruct the burgher's egress from the palace. Scarcely was he gone on this errand, however, when a pale reddish glare began to pour through the open window, waxing stronger each moment; and Mary, whose face was half-turned towards it, started forward, exclaiming, "Look, look! Good God, they have set fire to the city!"

Albert Maurice sprang to the casement also, and, as with his right hand he threw farther open the lattice, his left rested for a single moment on that of Mary of Burgundy, which she had accidentally placed upon the sill of the window. It was but for an instant, yet a thrill passed through his whole frame that made his brain seem to reel. But he had no time to indulge such thoughts. A bright pyramid of flame was at that very moment rising up through the clear night air, making a strange and fearful contrast with the pure sweet beams of the early moon. Redder and redder the baleful glare of the fire rose up, as if striving to outshine the moonlight, and streaming over the city, displayed the dark black masses of the buildings—wall, and roof, and tower, and spire standing out in clear relief upon the bright background of the blaze. Thence gleaming on, the two lights were seen flashing together upon the river, amid the innumerable black spots occasioned by the boats, in many of which a number of human figures might be descried, gazing with up-turned faces at the

flame. The wooden bridge, too, with the crossing and interlacing of its manifold piles and beams, appeared at a little distance beyond—a piece of dark fine tracery upon the glittering mass of the stream; and there, too, an immense multitude were to be observed, looking on calmly at the fire which was consuming some of the finest buildings in the city.

All this was gathered by the young citizen at one glance.

"They have set fire to the prison and the hall of justice," he cried, divining in an instant, both from the direction of the flames and the cries he had before heard, the crime that had been committed. "This must be put a stop to! Madam, farewell. When you shall hear to-morrow of the events of this night, you shall either hear that I am dead, or that I have done my duty."

The page had by this time returned; and Albert Maurice followed him with a rapid step through the same passages by which he had been conducted to his interview with the princess. Just as they reached the ground-floor of the castle, however, there was the sound of a coming step. The boy darted across the corridor in a moment, and Albert Maurice had but time to draw the cowl of his monk's gown over his head, when he was encountered by the Lord of Imbercourt, advancing with a hasty step towards the apartments of the princess.

The young citizen, with all his feelings excited by what had just passed, was both fearless and careless of any mortal thing, and, making slight way for the nobleman to pass, was striding rapidly on after the page; but Imbercourt caught him by the arm, exclaiming, "Who are you, sir? and what do you here?"

"I do the errand on which I am sent," replied the young citizen, "and interrupt no man. Unhand me, sir; for I am not to be stayed."

"Not till I see your face," replied Imbercourt; "your voice I should know. But that form, I doubt me, is no monk's."

As he spoke, he raised his hand towards the cowl which covered the head of the young citizen. But Albert Maurice shook off his grasp in a moment, saying, "Man, you are unwise! stay me further at your peril."

"Ho! a guard without there!" shouted the Lord of Imbercourt, till the whole passages rang, and cast himself immediately in the path of the burgher. But

Albert Maurice seized him in his powerful grasp, and with one effort sent him reeling to the farther part of the corridor, where he fell almost stunned upon the floor.

Without a moment's pause, the young citizen darted through the door by which the page had disappeared, traced without difficulty the passages which led to the postern, passed unquestioned by the sentry, who was conversing with the boy, and, in a moment after, was standing upon the terrace without the palace walls.

Casting off the monk's gown, he rolled it hastily up and threw it into the water; and then striding along the narrow quay between the Cours du Prince and the river, he directed his way at once towards the bridge. It was still covered with people; and some one, recognising him as he came upon it, pronounced his name, which was instantly spoken by a hundred other voices. Still Albert Maurice passed on, forcing his way through the crowd, but marking the various countenances, as he went, by the light which the flames of the burning buildings cast upon them. There were many he recognised, but he spoke to none for some moments, till he came to a stout honest-looking cloth-worker, near whom he stopped for an instant.

"Are you ready to obey my commands, Gibelin?" he demanded.

"To the death, Master Albert," replied the other; "the rogues have set fire to the hall of justice."

"I see," answered Albert Maurice; "follow me thither, and, as you go, collect as many as you can who will obey without question."

He then strode on, stopping from time to time at the various crowds, wherever he recognised a person on whom he could depend. With each of these a momentary conversation took place, of the same nature as that which he had held with the man he called Gibelin. To some, however, his address was much more brief. With some, merely, "Follow me, Kold! follow me, Gastner!"

His commands were instantly obeyed; those he charged to collect more were successful in doing so; and as he made his way forward, a body of two or three hundred men, gathered in this manner from the different crowds, continued pushing their way after him in an irregular manner, up the great street, in which the old prison and hall of justice were situated. Those build-

ings had been built so as to retire a little from the general façade of the street; and, being placed exactly opposite to each other, left a sort of square between them. The edifices on both sides were now on fire; but notwithstanding the intense heat, the place or square was filled to overflowing with people, whose appearance and occupation were altogether those of devils in human form. The blaze of the burning buildings, cast upon their swarthy and excited countenances—disfigured as they already were by drink and passion—a glare that seemed perfectly infernal. Loud shouts of exultation, or rather a yell of triumphant hatred, rent the air; and round about the square, suspended by the neck to the long stone water-spouts which then distinguished the city of Ghent, were to be seen a number of human figures, quivering and convulsed in the agonies of death, while the demon shouts of the populace hailed the contortions of their victims with horrible delight.

Such, it is well known, was the death of the unhappy eschevins whom Charles of Burgundy had appointed for the city of Ghent; but the vengeance which was immediately taken on some of the perpetrators of that cruel act is not so generally recorded. Albert Maurice found the multitude in the first exultation of the barbarous feat they had committed; and many of those who had taken a leading part therein were still making a parade of their activity. The young citizen, however, hesitated not a moment, but striding up to the wretch who held the end of one of the ropes used as the means of inflicting death upon the eschevins, he seized him at once by the collar of his jerkin, and dragged him towards the middle of the square.

A momentary movement was made by the people to resent this interference, and to rescue their comrade; but he was instantly passed from the hands of Albert Maurice to the trustworthy followers whom he had called together, with the words, "To the town-house!" The next moment the young citizen, without appearing even to see or notice the threatening aspect of the people, again strode through the midst of them, and made another prisoner of a better class, thundering no measured terms of reproach upon him as he cast him back into the hands of those that followed. The multitude now perceived that among themselves, in every part of the square, there were persons of their own rank

and appearance, acting with the young burgher, whose name,—never mentioned by any of the citizens without respect and applause,—also began to circulate rapidly among them. Even those most bent upon evil, not knowing who was prepared to support, and who to oppose them, lost confidence in themselves; fear, the most contagious of all diseases, seized them; and, one by one, they made their way from the scene of their criminal excesses. Those on the outside of the mass felt those within pressing to escape, and catching the alarm, began to run also; so that in a few minutes, Albert Maurice, and the men who had followed him, alone remained in the square, together with three prisoners, while a fourth had been hurried away.

To cut down the bodies of the unhappy men who had become the victims of popular fury was the first effort of the burgher and his companions; but as all aid in their case was found to be in vain, the attention of Albert Maurice was next turned to prevent the conflagration from spreading farther than the public building in which it had originated. As they were very much isolated in their situation, this purpose was easily effected; and as soon as it was accomplished, the young citizen proceeded with hasty steps towards the town-house, where he found a number of the municipal officers in somewhat lengthy debate concerning the measures to be pursued for tranquillizing the city. The superior mind of Albert Maurice instantly brought all wordy discussions to an end; and while armed parties of the burgher guard were despatched with peremptory orders to disperse the crowds, the attention of those who now ruled in Ghent was called to the case of the ruffians taken red-handed in the crime they had committed. The ancient laws of the city were hastily consulted; were found to be conclusive in regard to their guilt and punishment; a confessor was summoned; and ere daybreak the next morning, the four persons who had acted the most prominent part in the death of the eschevins had tasted the same fate before the town-hall of Ghent.

With a sternness which formed no part of his original nature, but which grows sadly and destructively upon the human heart in such scenes of excitement and violence, Albert Maurice himself saw the decree of the municipal council carried into effect ere he trod his way

homeward. As soon as the execution was over, he returned to his dwelling; and, exhausted with all he had gone through during the last eight-and-forty hours, he cast himself upon his bed, and slept.

CHAPTER III.

We must now, once more, change the scene, and leaving Ghent to proceed step by step through all the mazes of anarchy and confusion which are sure for a time to succeed the overthrow of established authority, we must trace the events which were occurring to some of the other personages connected with this true history.

Once more, then, let us turn to the forest of Hannut, which now, in the depth of winter, offered a very different scene from that which it had displayed either in the full summer or the brown autumn. It was early in the morning of the 20th of January, and, except on the scattered beeches which, mingling here and there with the oak, and the elm, and the birch, retained their crisp brown leaves longer than any of the other trees, not a bough in the wood, but, stripped of all that ornamented it in the summer, was covered with a fine white coating of glistening frost-work. Little snow, indeed, covered the ground, and that which had fallen was too hard frozen to have any tenacity; but,—drifted about the forest in a fine white powder, lodged here and there among the withered leaves, or collected in thick sweeps upon the dingle side,—it retained no form but that given to it by the wind; so that the deep foot-print of the stag or boar was effaced almost as soon as made, and the only mark by which the eye of the most experienced huntsman could have traced the lair of his quarry, would have been by the hoar-frost brushed off by the boughs of the thickets in the animal's course through the wood.

The morning was as clear and bright as if the sun were starting from the dark pavilion of the night, to run his race of glory through the long course of a summer's day; but the wind, whistling keenly through the woods,

and tingling on the cheeks of the early forester, told that the sharp reign of winter was in the acme of its power.

In a wide, open, grassy spot, at about half a mile from the high road to Louvain, were collected, on the morning to which I refer, about a dozen of our good friends the green riders. One or two were on horseback, but the greater part had dismounted, and were employing themselves in all the various ways which men devise to warm themselves on a winter's morning. They were evidently waiting for some one, and though the people who are watched for by such gentry are not generally in the most enviable situation in the world, yet, on the present occasion, the freebooters seemed to have no hostile purpose in view, and spoke of the person they expected as one of themselves.

"Cold work he will have of it, Master Matthew," said one of the adventurers, addressing the florid white-haired old man, whom we have had occasion to notice somewhat particularly in the cavern.

"By my faith!" replied the other, "when any thing disagreeable is to be done, he does not spare himself."

"Ay, but such is the leader for us," replied the other. "Think you he will be long? It is mighty cold, and the horses are half-frozen."

"Hark!" rejoined his companion; "that clatter may answer your question. By the Lord! he is coming down the hill at a fearful rate, for so slippery as it is. I trust he is not pursued. Stand to your arms, my men, and be ready to mount."

As he spoke, the sound of a horse's feet at full gallop was heard through the clear frosty air; and, in a moment after, along the little road—which wound away from the open space where the adventurers were collected over the side of a pretty steep acclivity—was seen a man on horseback, darting down towards them, without the slightest apparent regard to the sharpness of the descent, or the slipperiness of the road. He was armed like themselves, but with the distinction, that instead of the open basinet, or round steel cap, without visor, which they wore, his head was covered by a plumed casque, the beaver of which was down.

He drew not a rein till he was in the midst of them; then, with one slight touch, checked his horse and vaulted to the ground. The haste in which he had

arrived was now equalled by the rapidity of his words, as he gave out a number of different orders to the men who surrounded him, clearly and precisely, but with a celerity which showed that no time was to be lost.

"Matthew, my good lieutenant," he said, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the old man, "who is fittest to send to Germany, on an errand to a prince?"

"Why not myself?" demanded the adventurer.

"Because I want you here, and cannot do without you," replied the chief.

"Well, then, send Walter there," rejoined the old man: "he is a Frenchman, and courtly in his way."

"Courtly, and honest too," added the Vert Gallant, "which is a wonder. There, Master Walter, take that letter to the Bishop of Triers. You will find him at Cologne with the bishop of that city. There, mount and be gone! you know your way. Here is a purse of gold to pay your expenses. The bishop will send you on to the archduke. The Germans are frugal—therefore be not you over-fine; yet spare not the florins, where it may do honour to him that sent you. Away!

"You, good Matthew, yourself," continued the Vert Gallant, "speed like lightning to Ghent; but cast off your steel jacket, and robe me yourself like the good burgher of a country town. Seek out your old friend Martin Fruse; confer with him, and with his nephew Albert Maurice; they are now all powerful in Ghent. Bid them beware of Louis King of France. Tell them it is his purpose to force the Princess Mary into a marriage with his puny son, and to make her yield her fair lands into his hand, that he himself might seize them all when death lays hold upon his sickly boy. Bid them oppose it by all means, but by none more than by delay. Risk not your person, however; and if you cannot speak with them in safety, write down the message, and have it given by another hand. You, Frank Von Halle—you are bold and shrewd, though you have but little speech: follow Matthew Gournay, habited as his man; but when you are within the walls of Ghent, find out some way of speech with the princess; and, whether in public or in private, give her that ring, with this small slip of paper. Then leave the city as quickly as you may."

"I doubt me it will be sure death," replied Von Halle, looking up with an inquiring glance

"What! you afraid, Von Halle!" exclaimed his leader; "but go, there is no fear."

"Afraid! no, no," replied the man; "but I only thought, if I were to die, I would go home first, and, with Martin of Gravelines and Dick Drub the Devil, would drink out the pipe of sack I bought; pity it should be wasted."

"Keep it for another time," replied the Vert Gallant, "for, by my faith, your errand to Ghent will never stop your drinking it."

"Well, well; if I die, tell the other two to finish it," replied the man; "pity it should be wasted;" and so sprang on his horse.

"Hold, Matthew," cried the Vert Gallant, as the two soldiers were about to depart without more words; "meet me five days hence in the wood between Swynaerde and Deynse. So lose no time. You know the red cross near Astene."

The two instantly rode off; and the Vert Gallant then turned to the others, and continued his orders, for marching the whole force he had under his command—which seemed to be considerable—into the woods in the neighbourhood of Ghent.

Those woods, though then very extensive, and covering acres of ground which are now in rich cultivation, were nevertheless too small to afford perfect shelter and concealment for such a large body of adventurers as had long tenanted the vaster and less frequented forest-tracks near Hannut, unless the entire band were subdivided into many smaller ones, and distributed through various parts of the country. All this, however, was foreseen and arranged by the leader of the free companions; and it is probable that he also trusted to the distracted state of the country—throughout which any thing like general police was, for the time, at an end—for perfect immunity in his bold advance to the very gates of the capital of Flanders.

All his orders were speedily given, and one by one his companions left him, as they received their instructions, so that at length he stood alone. He paused for a moment on the spot, patting the neck of his strong fiery horse; and,—as men will sometimes do when they fancy themselves full of successful designs, and are excited by the expectation of great events,—addressing to the nearest object of the brute creation those secret

out-breakings of the heart which he might have feared to trust in the unsafe charge of his fellow-men.

"Now, my bold horse, now," he exclaimed, "the moment is come, for which, during many a long year, I have waited and watched! The star of my house is once more in the ascendant, and the reign of tyranny is at an end—let him who dares stand between me and my right, for not another hour will I pause till justice is fully done."

While he was thus speaking, a sort of slight distant murmur came along, so mingled with the whistling of the wind that he had to listen for some moments before he could ascertain whether it proceeded from the mere increased waving of the boughs occasioned by the gale rising, or whether it was the distant sound of a number of persons travelling along the road which he had just passed.

He was soon satisfied; and as he clearly distinguished voices, and the jingling tramp of a travelling party of that day, he sprang upon his horse, leaped him over a small brook that trickled half-congealed through the grass, and plunged into a deep thicket beyond, the bushes and trees of which were of sufficient height to screen him from the observation of the passengers.

The party whose tongues he had heard soon came on. It comprised about thirty people, all well armed, and dressed splendidly, bearing the straight cross, which at that time distinguished France from Burgundy. The splendid apparel of the whole body, the number of the men-at-arms, of which it was principally composed, together with certain signs of peaceful dispositions on their own part, evinced at once that the cavalcade, which came winding along the road, consisted of some envoy from France and his escort, furnished with those letters of safe-conduct which guarded them from any hostile act on the part of the government of the country through which they passed, but prepared to resist any casual attacks from the lawless bands that were then rife.

Not exactly at the head of the cavalcade,—for two stout archers armed at all points led the way,—but at the head of the principal body, appeared a small, dark, ill-featured man, whose person even an extraordinary display of splendour in his apparel sufficed not to render any thing but what it was, insignificant. Velvet and gold, and nodding plumes, could do nothing in his favour; and the

only thing which made his appearance in any degree remarkable was an air of silent, calm, and determined cunning, which had in it something fearful from its very intensity. One gazed upon him as on a serpent, which, however small and powerless in appearance, inspires terror in much mightier things than itself, from the venom of its fangs.

He rode on quietly, speaking little to any one; and that which he did say was all uttered in a calm, soft, insinuating tone, which corresponded well with the expression of his countenance. The rest of the party laughed and talked with much less ceremony and restraint than the presence of so dignified a person as an ambassador might have required, had he been by state and station fit to have inspired respect. Such seemed not to be the case in the present instance; and though not one word on any other than the most commonplace subjects passed among the followers of the Count de Meulan,—for so the ambassador was called,—yet their light laughter and gay jokes, breaking forth every moment close to his ear, were any thing but ceremonious or reverential.

Some little difficulty seemed now to occur in regard to the road that the party were travelling. It appeared that hitherto, on turning slightly from the high road, they had followed the foot-marks of the Vert Gallant's charger; taking them for those left by the horse of an avant-courier, who had been despatched to prepare for them at the next town. When they found, however, that the steps turned into the savanna, and lost themselves in a number of others, a halt immediately took place; and, after a short consultation, by order of the ambassador, the whole party wheeled round, and wisely returned to the high road.

Their whole proceedings, however, had been watched by one they knew not of; and almost before they were out of sight, the Vert Gallant emerged from his concealment, and, with a laugh which rang with contempt, turned his horse's head and galloped away.

The Count de Meulan—or, in other words, Olivier le Dain, the barber of Louis XI., whom that monarch had raised from the lowest class for the basest qualities, and whom he now sent as ambassador, to treat with the young heiress of Burgundy, and to intrigue with her subjects,—had hardly proceeded two hours on the high

road, when a fat rolling monk of the order of St. Francis, mounted on a sleek mule, the picture of himself, joined the rear of the ambassador's escort, and entering into jovial conversation with some of the men-at-arms, besought their leave to travel as far as they went on the road to Ghent under their protection, alleging that the country was in such a disturbed state, that even a poor brother like himself could not travel in any safety. The light-hearted Frenchmen easily granted his request, observing, in an under tone to each other, that Olivier the Devil,—such was the familiar cognomen of the respectable personage they followed,—could not in all conscience travel without a monk in his train.

Father Barnabas, whom we have seen before, no sooner found himself added to the suite of the ambassador, than he employed those means he well knew would make his society agreeable to the men-at-arms who had given him protection; and by many a jolly carouse, and many a licentious bacchanalian song, he soon won favour on all hands. Even the barber count himself, whose more sensual propensities were only restrained by his cunning, found no fault with the merry friar, whose sly and cutting jests, combined with the sleek and quiet look of stupidity which always accompanied them, found means to draw up even his lip into a smile, that might have been mistaken for a sneer. On one occasion he felt disposed to put some shrewd questions to worthy Father Barnabas, as to his situation and pursuits; and even began to do so on the second night of their journey, as, occupying the best seat by the fire in the little hostelry at which they lodged, he eyed the impenetrable fat countenance before him with the sort of curiosity one feels to pry into any thing that we see will be difficult to discover.

But the monk was at least his match; and if the weapons with which they engaged in the keen contest of their wits were not precisely the same on both parts, the combat resembled that of the elephant and the rhinoceros,—whenever Olivier the wicked strove to seize the monk and close with him, his antagonist ran under him and gored him. Thus, when, by some casual words, the envoy thought he had discovered that his companion was a native of Saarvelt, and suddenly put the question to him at once, the other replied, "No, no; I only remember it well, on account of a barber's

boy who was there, and whose real name was—pho! I forget his real name; but he is a great man now-a-days, and has held a basin under the nose of a king."

The quiet, unconscious manner in which this was said left Olivier le Dain, with all his cunning, in doubt whether the jolly friar really recognised in him the barber's boy of Saarvelt, or whether the allusion had been merely accidental; but he resolved not to question any more a person of such a memory, and possibly determined to take care that the most effectual stop should be put to its exercise in future, if those plans regarding Ghent should prove successful, in the execution of which he was now engaged.

Too wise, however, to show any degree of harshness towards the monk at the time,—a proceeding which would have pointed home the sarcasm for his men-at-arms, on whose faces he thought he had remarked a sneering smile as the other spoke,—he allowed good Father Barnabas to travel on under his escort, meditating a lesson for him when he arrived at his journey's end, which some might have thought severe. In the mean time, as they travelled on, there was about the monk a sort of subdued triumph—a self-satisfied chuckle in his laugh, especially when he jested the gay and boasting Frenchmen upon their arms and their exploits, that occasionally wakened a suspicion in the mind of Olivier le Dain, whose own conduct was far too crooked for him to believe that any one else could act straightforwardly.

Still no danger appeared; and the party arrived in perfect safety within about four leagues of Ghent. There, after pausing for supper at an inn, it was found, on preparing to resume their journey, and enter the city that night, that the person who had hitherto guided them was so drunk as hardly to be able to sit his horse. The ambassador demanded a guide of the host, but none could be found; and the worthy keeper of the inn answered, with true Flemish coolness, that he would not spare any one of his own household. "Could not the monk guide them?" he demanded. "If his eyes served him, he had seen his broad face in that part of the world before."

"Ay, marry can I, my son," replied Father Barnabas; "but I offer no service before it is asked. There is a proverb against it, man."

As the affairs he had to transact were of deep importance, and minutes were of the utmost consequence to success, Olivier le Dain, though by no means fond of riding at night, and not at all prepossessed in favour of the monk, consented to accept him as a guide; and the party accordingly set out. By a whispered arrangement between the respectable Count de Meulan and the captain of his escort, however, a large part of the armed attendants rode on at a sufficient distance before, to enable Olivier to make his retreat if he heard any attack upon this avant guard, while the monk, riding between two troopers, close to the worthy barber, was held as a sort of hostage for the security of the road on which he was about to pilot them. Father Barnabas, whether he perceived any thing strange in the array in which they set out, or not, made no opposition; and jogged on contentedly upon his mule, chattering gayly as he went, and seasoning his discourse with various choice allusions to barbers, and basins, and beards, much more to the gratification of the men-at-arms than of Olivier le Dain.

Thus proceeded the cavalcade, till they reached the little wood of Swynaerde, near Merebek, where the road from Alost, in ancient days, crossed the Scheldt, over a wooden bridge, where a certain pontage was charged upon each horse that passed. Here the mind of the barber ambassador was in some degree relieved, by hearing from the toll-taker that all was quiet and safe, though six good miles still lay between him and Ghent, and that through a dark wood of tall trees. At the distance of about a mile from the bridge was a red cross, marking the direction of four different roads which there intersected each other; and the whole party paused, as it was too dark to read the directions thereon inscribed, to receive the instructions of the monk.

"Straight on! straight on!" cried Father Barnabas; —and the first part of the escort moved forward, though somewhat nearer to the rest of the body than before; but the moment they had again resumed their march there was a low sharp whistle, and a sound of rushing and rustling all around them. Olivier le Dain, who was already following the van, drew in his rein; and the whistle, repeated a thousand times in different parts of the wood round about, showed him at once that his party was beset. Fear certainly was the predominant feeling

in his mind; but even that very absorbing sensation did not banish a passion equally strong; and while he turned his horse's head to fly back to the bridge with all speed, he did not fail to say, in a voice but little changed from its ordinary calm and sustained tone, "We are betrayed! kill the monk!" But both Olivier's purpose of escape and his desire of vengeance were disappointed. At the very first whistle, the friar had slipped unperceived from his sleek mule, and passing under the animal's belly, was no longer to be seen; and before the luckless ambassador could reach the road, which led away to the bridge, he found it occupied by armed men. To whichever side he turned, the same sight presented itself; and even on the highway leading to Ghent he found a still stronger party interposed between him and the first division of his escort. He thus stood in the midst of the open square of the cross road, accompanied by about twelve attendants, and surrounded by a body of adventurers which could not be less than one or two hundred, but which fear and darkness magnified into a much greater number. The scene and situation were by no means pleasant. Not a sound was to be heard, but the echo of horses' feet ringing over the hard frozen ground,—from which he justly inferred that the advanced party of his escort, by whom he was neither loved nor respected, finding themselves infinitely overmatched, had galloped off, leaving him to his fate; and nothing was to be seen in the darkness of the night but the black trunks of the trees, slightly relieved by the colour of the ground, which was covered by a thin drift of snow, while a number of dim human forms appeared, occupying all the different roads; and a multitude of faint dull spots of fire, drawn in a complete circle round him, showed the ambassador that the slow matches of the arquebusiers into whose hands he had fallen were prepared against resistance.

For a moment or two not a word was spoken; but at length a voice not far from him exclaimed, "Lord a' mercy! Only to think of the barber's boy of Saarvelt coming ambassador to Ghent! Lack a day! lack a day, Noll! lack a day! thou art become a mighty great man! Thou hast lathered and shaved to some purpose, ha, ha, ha!" And the voice of the monk was drowned in his own laughter, the contagious merriment of whose thick

plum-porridge sounds instantly affected all around; and the whole forest rang and echoed to the peals.

"What would ye, fair sirs?" demanded the soft silken tones of Olivier le Dain. "If laughter be all ye seek, laugh on; but let me pass upon my way. If it be gold ye want, there, take my purse; I make you welcome to it."

"A fool and his money!" cried the monk, snatching the purse. "But, 'faith! Master Noll, the barber, it is generous of you to give what you cannot keep unless we like it."

"Cease your fooling, monk!" cried the stern voice of some one advancing from the wood. "Get off your horse, sir barber; you shall know my pleasure with you when it suits me to tell it. And now answer me! How dare you, a low mechanical slave, presume to undertake a mission to the Duchess of Burgundy, without one drop of noble blood in your veins?"

"Your pardon, fair sir!" replied Olivier, dismounting slowly, and standing in an attitude of deprecation before the tall commanding figure by whom he was addressed; —"your pardon; I was rendered noble by my sovereign lord the king, for the very purpose, as his letters patent will show."

"'Faith! the letters patent must be miraculous ones, that could ennoble one drop of your slave's blood," replied the Vert Gallant. "There, take him away! Treat him not ill; but keep him safe and fast. Search his person, his servants, and his sumpter-horses. Examine well the stuffings of the saddles, and the paddings of their coats; and bring every paper and parchment you may find."

"But listen to me, fair sir! Only hear me!" entreated Olivier le Dain. "Surely you will not show such treatment to an ambassador. My papers and my person are sacred in every Christian land."

"Pshaw!" cried the Vert Gallant. "When Louis King of France so far forgets what is due to a princess, as to send to the heiress of Burgundy a mean, cunning barber as an ambassador, he can only expect that others will also forget the character with which he chooses to invest his lackey. Besides, what is it to me that you are ambassador to Burgundy? You are no ambassador to me. I am duke of the forests; and when you come as

envoy to me, you shall have forest cheer. Away with him, and do my bidding!"

Closely guarded, but well treated, Olivier le Dain and his attendants were detained for some days in the woods near Ghent, during the greater part of which time, though occasionally compelled to sleep in a hut of boughs, they resided generally in a small lonely house, which had belonged in former days to the forester.

At length, one morning, suddenly, while the twilight was still gray, the ambassador and his followers were called from their repose, and placed upon the horses which brought them. All their apparel and jewels were restored, as well as their arms; and of the treasure which the barber had brought with him, for the purpose of bribing the populace of Ghent, a sufficient portion was left in his possession to maintain his dignity, but not to effect the object he had intended.

He was then told to follow his own course, for that he was free to come or go; and with all speed he turned his rein towards Ghent, at which place he arrived in safety, though seven days after the period which he had fixed for his coming.

CHAPTER IV.

In the mean time, many events had occurred within the walls of the city of Ghent, of which some account must be given, though perhaps it may be necessary to follow the same desultory manner in which they are related in shrewd old Philip de Comines and pompous Jean de Molinet.

The quelled tumult, the extinguished fire, and the prompt justice done upon some of the incendiaries, spread in a thousand shapes through the town; and as, whenever fame has marked a hero for her own, she never fails to load him with many more honours than his due, Albert Maurice had soon acquired the reputation of a thousand miracles of skill, and courage, and judgment, far beyond the acts he had really performed. Thus, when, after a brief sleep and a hasty repose, he

issued forth from his house the next morning, and rode on to the town-house, he found the people—on whose wrath for their thwarted passions he had fully counted—ready, on the contrary, to shout gratulations and plaudits on his path. At the town-house, the syndics and notables of all the trades had already assembled, and the druggist Ganay was in the very act of proposing that an address of thanks and applause should be voted to the young burgher for his noble and courageous conduct of the preceding evening. Albert Maurice, however, was not to be blinded; and even when the druggist was declaiming vehemently against the outrages of the foregoing night, and lamenting that the populace had dealt upon the eschevins without due judgment by law, the eye of the young citizen fixed upon him with a glance of keen reproach, which Ganay at once translated, and translated rightly—"You have deceived me."

To have done so, however, was no matter of shame to the dark and artful man who was speaking; and, as their eyes met, a slight smile of triumphant meaning curled his lip, while with a fresh burst of eloquence he called upon the assembly to testify their admiration of the man who had saved the city from pillage and conflagration. The address of thanks was carried by acclamation; and Albert Maurice soon found that it was the determination of the more active part of the citizens, under the immediate influence of Ganay, to carry forward with eager rapidity all those bold measures which would deprive the sovereigns of any real power for the future, and rest it entirely in the hands of the people—or rather, in the hands of whatever person had courage, energy, and talent to snatch it from their grasp, and retain it in his own. Twenty-six eschevins, together with the lieutenant-bailli, and three pensioners, were immediately elected by the citizens, to replace those who had been massacred, and to administer the law; but the grand bailli and chief pensioner were still to be elected, and Albert Maurice with surprise heard the determination of the people to confound those two high offices in his own person. From the body of magistrates three persons were selected, as a president and two consuls, as they were called, and extraordinary powers were intrusted to them. The president named at once was the chief officer of

the city, Albert Maurice; and Ganay, the druggist, was added as one of the consuls. The third office was not so easily filled; and a strong attempt was made to raise to it a fierce and brutal man, whose talents perhaps appeared greater than they really were, from the total want of any restraints of feeling and moral principle, to limit the field in which they were exercised.

Some one, however, luckily proposed the name of worthy Martin Fruse; and his nomination, seconded by the eloquent voice of his nephew, was instantly acquiesced in by all. A slight cloud passed over the brow of the druggist as he found his power likely to be counterbalanced by the influence of one who, if he possessed no other quality to render him great, had at least that rectitude of feeling which was a fearful stumbling-block in the way of crooked designs. But unchangeable determination of purpose, and unscrupulous exercise of means, had rendered the druggist so often successful in things which seemed hopeless, that he bore, with scarcely a care, any change of circumstances, confident of finding some path to his object in the end.

After one of those noisy and tumultuous assemblies, in the course of which, though no business is transacted with calm reason, an infinity of acts are performed by impulse, the meeting at the town-house broke up; and while Martin Fruse returned to his dwelling on foot, as was his invariable custom, Albert Maurice and the druggist mounted their horses and rode slowly homeward. Their conversation was long and rapid—too long, indeed, for transcription here; but the commencement of it must not be omitted, even for the sake of brevity.

"Ganay, you have deceived me!" said Albert Maurice, as soon as they were in some degree free from the crowd.

"I have!" was the calm reply of the druggist. "You are ungrateful, Albert. You have never thanked me for it. What, you would pretend you do not see cause for thanks! Had not the populace taken it into their own hands, the council must have condemned those foul vultures who have so long preyed upon us. Ay, I say *must*; and then whose name but that of Albert Maurice must have stood among others in the order for their death? As I have managed it, the severity was no act of yours. You have offended none—no, not even the princess; and, on the contrary, you have had the means

of adding, in one night, more to your fame than your whole life has won before. You have had an opportunity of winning honour and respect from commons and from nobles, and love and gratitude from Mary of Burgundy. Still further, have you not, in one night, in consequence of acts with which you accuse me almost as a crime—have you not climbed to the very height of power in your native land?—ay, I say the height of power; for who is there, be he duke, or count, or prince, who has so much authority as he who sways the power of all the people of Flanders? A few steps more, and your hand may seize the—"

"The what?" demanded Albert Maurice, as the other paused.

"No matter," replied the druggist. "The gates of ambition are cast wide open before you; and you must on, whether you will or not."

"Ha! and who shall force me?" demanded Albert Maurice.

"Fate!—Destiny!" replied the druggist. "'Tis many years ago, and you were then a mere boy; but I remember your fate was predicted in the forest of Hannut by that gloomy old lord, whose only commune, for many a year, had been with the bright stars. 'Twas one night when we fell accidentally into the hands of the free companions—and he foretold that you should go on from power to power successfully through life, and that no one should check you but yourself."

"And do *you* believe in such vain dreams?" rejoined Albert Maurice.

"I believe," replied the druggist, gravely, "that our lot through life is immutably fixed from the cradle to the grave; that like a wild horse we may foam and plunge, or like a dull jade plod onward at a foot-pace—but that the firm rider Fate still spurs us on upon the destined course; and when the stated goal is won, casts down the bridle on our neck, and leaves us to repose. I believe, too, that the stars, as well as many other things, may tell, to those who study them, events to come; for, depend upon it, every thing throughout the universe fits closely, like the blocks cut for a perfect arch; so that, from the form and position of the neighbouring stones, a person who has deeply studied may tell to a certainty the shape and size of any other."

Albert Maurice mused for a moment over the con-

fession of this strange creed, and its illustration, and then demanded, "What did the old lord say concerning me!"

The druggist repeated his former words; and his young companion again mused for a brief space. Then suddenly bringing back the conversation to the matter in which it arose, he said, "Ganay, you have deceived me; and not for my interest, but for your own revenge; you have worked your will, and I trust that you are now sated. Better for us both to labour together as far as may be, than stand in the very outset face to face as foes. Are you contented with the blood already shed?"

"There must be one more!" said the druggist, resolutely.

"And whom do you aim at now?" demanded the young citizen, with no small loathing and horror towards his companion; but yet with a conviction that by some means he would accomplish his purpose.

"It matters not," replied Ganay; "but set your mind at ease. The man to whom I point is less an enemy to myself than an enemy to the state; and I give you my promise that I will practise naught against his life but with your consent. So guilty is he, and so convinced shall you be of his guilt, that your own hand shall sign the warrant for his death. But, oh! Albert Maurice, if you believe that the blood shed last night is all that must be shed to effect the purposes you seek, sadly, sadly do you deceive yourself. Prepare to bid it flow like water, or betake you to a monastery! Ambition joined to faint-hearted pity is like a tame lion at a show led about by a woman."

"But there is such a thing as patriotism," replied Albert Maurice; yet he named the word but faintly, compared with the tone he would have given it three days before.

"Ay," said the druggist; "patriotism! The first step to ambition—but that stage is past."

Well did Ganay know that there exists no means of persuading a human being to any course of action so powerful as by convincing him it is inevitable. To do so, however, there must be probability as a basis; and Ganay had watched too closely the most minute turns of his companion's behaviour during many months, not to divine the spark of ambition lying half-smothered at the bottom of his heart. Nor had the effect of Mary of Bur-

gundy's eyes upon the colour and the voice of Albert Maurice been lost upon the keen spirit that followed him; and he fancied he beheld an easy method of bending him to his own purpose. He saw, indeed, that if, either by love or any other means, he could fan that spark into a flame, he must leave him to run his course, without a struggle or a hope to deprive him of the prize; nay, that he must aid him with his whole cunning to raise up a new authority in the land, on the basis of that they were about to overthrow. But Ganay was not ambitious of aught but avarice and revenge; and he soon perceived that these two master-passions of his soul *must* be gratified by Albert Maurice in his ascent to power.

As he rode on, he spoke long of their future prospects. He cast away at once the enthusiastic cant he had at one time assumed towards him, of patriotism and the entire abnegation of self; and, in order to habituate his mind fully to the dreams of ambition, he spoke of them as things already determined and to be. But still, to smooth the transition, he failed not to point out the mighty benefits that a ruler with a truly liberal heart might confer upon his people—it mattered not what he was called—governor, lord, duke, prince, or king. As for a pure republic, the land was not yet in a state fit for it, he said: but what a boon—a mighty boon—might not that man grant to the whole world, who, starting up from among the people, were to rule them for their own happiness alone, and to show to other monarchs the immense advantages of such a sway.

"But if you speak of this land," replied Albert Maurice, in whose heart he had discovered the unfortified spot,—"but if you speak of this land, how can any man so start up, without tearing her inheritance from the gentlest, the noblest of beings?"

"By one means alone," replied Ganay, in a grave decided tone: "by uniting her fate with his own."

Albert Maurice, thrown off his guard by so bold and straight-forward an allusion to that which was passing in his own heart, suddenly drew in his reins, and glanced his eye over the countenance of the druggist, to see if there were no sneer at the presumption of his very dreams hidden beneath the calm tone the other assumed. But all was tranquil, and even stern; and, after a momentary pause, the young burgher replied, though with

a flushed and burning cheek,—"If, as we know her to be, she is so gentle, and noble, and kind-hearted, as you admit, why not leave her to rule her hereditary lands by the dictates of her generous will?"

"What! before a year be over," replied Ganay, "to give her hand, and with it the wealth, and welfare, and happiness of her people, to some of the proud tyrants under which the country groans—or, at the instigation of her intriguing ministers, to bestow the whole upon some foreign prince, who will come among us without one sympathy, to grind into the dust the stranger-subjects given him like serfs as a part of his wife's portion!—Is this what you would have?"

Albert Maurice was silent, but not so Ganay; and, as they proceeded, with poisonous eloquence he poured forth every argument to show both the necessity and the facility of the course he suggested. He cited Artevelte as an instance of what talented ambition had accomplished in that very city, and in an age when all the institutions of feudal pride were a thousand-fold stricter than they had since become. He depicted him, now a lackey in a noble house in France, and then a mead-brewer in Ghent, and then a popular leader, and then a companion of princes, seated beside the conquering and accomplished Edward of England, treating as a prince with Philip of France, waging war at the head of mighty armies, and balancing the fate of Europe by his power. He had fallen, at length, he said, it was true; but he had fallen by his vices and his follies; and as far as virtues, talents, courage, or accomplishments went, could Artevelte compete, for one hour, with the man to whom he then spoke? The one was a lackey, risen from the lowest order of the state; the other sprung from the highest class of the burghers, of the first commercial city in the north of Europe—burghers who already ranked almost with nobility, and who, in fact, should rank far higher.

With the skill of a practised musician, whose finger lights with nice precision on all the tones and half-tones of his instrument, Ganay found means to touch every feeling in the bosom of the young burgher, and make every chord vibrate with the sound that he desired. True it is, indeed, that the heart of Albert Maurice was not one to have been thus worked upon had not the feelings been already there; and the task of his companion

—an easy one in comparison—was merely to excite those feelings into stronger action.

At length they reached the door of his own dwelling; and Albert Maurice alighted from his horse without asking the druggist to do so too: but Ganay rode on contented; for he saw that he had given the young citizen matter for thoughts which he sought to indulge in private, and he desired no better. Nor had his words failed to sink deep. Albert Maurice, indeed, passed rapidly over in his mind all the intermediate steps; but there rested behind, as a result, the proud, the inspiring conviction, that all which he chose to snatch at was within his grasp—that in one single day he had reached a height of power from which it was but a step to the side of Mary of Burgundy; and the conviction was a dangerous one for his virtue and his peace. Much, however, was still to be done; and he sat down to revolve all that must be attempted to render the daring hopes of mingled love and ambition, with which his own heart beat, a passion of the people—to crush, or scatter, or circumvent the many rivals that must and would arise—and to win the love of her upon whose affections all his dreams were founded. For the latter object he felt that it was necessary to bury deep in his own heart the aspirations which rose within it, till manifold communings, service, and tenderness should have ripened the esteem in which he saw he was held into warmer feelings. Thus he pondered till, before he was aware, schemes were formed, and deeds were prepared, which all eternity could not annul.

The following days passed much in the same manner; but each day brought forward to the light some of the many difficulties with which the young citizen would have to contend in his progress towards the great object before his eyes; but which, having calculated upon them from the first, he was prepared to meet as soon as they assumed a tangible form. During the course of that morning which followed the day of his elevation to the supreme power in the city, the levy of a large body of troops was voted, and the entire command was assigned to himself; but, before night, the Lord of Ravestein, the Duke of Cleves, and the Bishop of Liege arrived, to counsel and support the princess; and though each came separately, their train, united, amounted to nearly a thousand men. A wary guard, however, was held

upon the gates of Ghent; and only thirty attendants were allowed to pass within the walls in company with each of the noble visiters, while, much to the discontent of their lords, the rest were sent back to their various territories.

A new scene of intrigue immediately followed the arrival of these princes in the palace; and it soon reached the ears of Albert Maurice, that the Duke of Cleves was moving heaven and earth to obtain the hand of the orphan princess of Burgundy for his son. Almost at the same time, good Martin Fruse received intelligence, from a quarter which we already know, that Louis XI. sought to unite France and Burgundy by a union between the heiress of Charles the Bold and his sickly child the dauphin: and it soon became evident, that Imbercourt and Hugonet, supported by the Lord of Ravestein, were eagerly pressing Mary to sacrifice her own feelings to the benefit of her country, and to bestow her hand upon the feeble boy.

Clear, however—most clear, it was, both to Albert Maurice and to the druggist Ganay, that while these parties contended for mastery, they must equally court the people of Ghent; and more especially must bow to the young citizen himself, whose power they all well knew, and whose designs they did not suspect. Of neither of the parties at the court did Albert Maurice at first entertain much fear; for he felt sure that the heart of Mary of Burgundy, however tutored to sacrifice her own will, would strongly revolt against either alliance,—the one with a fierce and brutal sot—the other with a sickly child. But tidings speedily arrived which made him fear that force or terror would soon compel the unhappy girl to yield herself to France. News now reached him from an unknown hand, that Louis was already in the field; that Picardy was full of the troops of France; and that Comines and Bourbon were advancing along the line of the Somme. An ambassador, too, he was warned at the same time, was on his way from France to Ghent; and to show the young citizen that he was sent rather to tamper with the people than to negotiate with the princess, or even with the municipal council, copies of his commission and instructions reached him from an unknown source, together with an assurance that some days would yet elapse before he could appear at the gates.

The near approach of the ambassador, whom we have already seen delayed on his journey, remained unknown in the palace; but hourly tidings were received of the progress of the French king, and of his unjust claims upon the whole inheritance of the late Duke of Burgundy. The pretences he set forth were so futile and absurd—so contrary to every principle of law or justice—that every one believed his sole motive was to force the heiress of Burgundy into an immediate marriage with his son. Imbercourt, Hugonet, and all the ministers of the late duke saw his proceedings in the same point of view; and incessantly besought the unhappy Mary to yield to her fate, and, before her dominions were entirely incorporated with France, to avert the misfortunes that must fall upon herself and her people, by yielding her hand to the dauphin.

The same conclusion in regard to the motives of Louis XI. was drawn by the Duke of Cleves; but the result on his own conduct was totally different. Instead of beseeching Mary to yield to necessity, he opposed such advice with determined and angry vehemence. He stigmatized Hugonet and Imbercourt as traitors; and, in order to destroy the powerful party opposed to his own views in the council of the princess, he laid himself out to court the people; rode side by side with Albert Maurice through the streets of the city, amid the shouts of the multitude; and, after having excited the municipal body to petition that their president might have a seat in the provincial council of Flanders, he himself presented the address, which he knew that neither Mary nor her ministers dared to refuse.

Albert Maurice, however, suffered himself not to be dazzled: and though joy inexpressible thrilled at his heart at every triumphant step he took in advance; though his whole soul rejoiced at the constant opportunity now afforded him of daily communication with her he dared to love; yet he allowed neither passion nor success for a moment to relax his energies or his watchfulness; and he yielded to the pretensions of the Duke of Cleves in favour of his son, only so far as might stay the precipitate haste with which the French alliance might otherwise have been concluded.

With Imbercourt he clashed continually; and the firm, calm reasoning of the minister was constantly met and overpowered by the fiery and brilliant eloquence of

the young citizen. Nor was he, even in opposing her faithful and her esteemed minister, without deriving some encouragement from the eyes of Mary herself, whenever the discussion took place in her presence: for though she both loved and reverenced the wise and gallant friend of her father, who advocated, for her own interests, the proposed union with the dauphin; yet to her heart that union was so repugnant, that she could not but look with pleasure on every one who opposed it, nor listen without delight to arguments which gave her new courage to resist.

Nor did Albert Maurice ever support the idea of her marriage with another; so that while advancing his own design, and winning both her gratitude and admiration, he was never found in opposition to her wishes; and still, when he appeared, she welcomed his coming with a smile and with a look of pleasure which, without the slightest purpose of deceit, served painfully to deceive.

Nevertheless, the Duke of Cleves made rapid progress; and, not contented with the efforts of the young citizen to oppose the French alliance, he left no means untried to stimulate the people to support his own design. The watchful eye of Albert Maurice was indeed upon him, but still his strides towards the accomplishment of his schemes were more speedy than the other had anticipated; and the cries he heard when once riding towards the palace, of "Long live the Duke of Cleves! Long live his gallant son!" showed him at once that it was time to raise up some barrier against his pretensions. At the same time, he felt, that to give even a slight support to the opposite party might prove fatal to his hopes; and, after a long consultation with Ganay, he determined to seek out some one who might openly pretend to Mary's hand, and draw away the countenance of the people from the Duke of Cleves; but whose pretensions would be even more repugnant, not only to herself, but to her ministers, her friends, and her nobles, than even his own might prove thereafter. But who was to be the man?

Accompanied by the crowd of attendants who now always followed his footsteps when he rode forth as chief magistrate of Ghent, Albert Maurice hastened to the palace some minutes before the council met, and was admitted to the presence of the princess, whose

smile gave him even a more glad reception than ordinary. She was not alone, however; for besides her usual train of ladies, a page, a chamberlain, and a man dressed as a peasant, but whose scarred cheek told tales of warlike broils, stood before her when he entered.

"Oh! you are most welcome, sir president," said the princess, "and have come to afford me counsel at a good moment. Here is a ring just returned to me, which I gave some months ago to a stranger who saved me, I believe, from death, in a thunder-storm, near Tirlemont. I promised, at the same time, that on his sending it back, I would grant whatever he might ask, if it were consistent with my honour and my dignity. See what he says on this slip of parchment.—'He to whom the Duchess of Burgundy gave this ring demands, as the boon of which it is a pledge, the instant liberation of Adolphus Duke of Gueldres, and his restoration to his own domains.'"

Albert Maurice almost started; for there was a strange coincidence between the demand which the princess had just read, and the thoughts which had been passing in his mind as he rode thither. "Lady," he said, "it seems to me that there is but one counsel to be given you. Your word is pledged; the liberation of the Duke of Gueldres—monster though he be—*is* consistent with your honour and dignity; and your promise must be fulfilled."

"You always judge nobly, sir president," replied the princess; "and I thank you now, and ever shall thank you, for supporting that which is just and generous, however contrary it may be to apparent interests."

"Believe me, madam," replied the young citizen, bending low to conceal the joy that sparkled in his eyes,—"believe me, that it shall ever be my endeavour to strive both to obtain your best interests, and those of the country, which are, indeed, inseparable; and I would ask you as a boon through all the future—whatever you may see or think strange in my demeanour—to believe that your good and my country's are still the motive."

"I will—I will, indeed," replied the princess; "for it would be hard to make me suppose that you, whom I have seen act so nobly in circumstances of personal danger and difficulty, would forget your honour and integrity when trusted by your countrymen and your sovereign."

A slight flush passed over the cheek of Albert Maurice, at such praise. It was not exactly that he knew himself undeserving of it, for he had laboured hard and successfully to convince himself that his own aggrandizement, the welfare of the country—ay, and he almost hoped, the happiness of Mary herself—were inseparably united. He replied, however—not with words of course, for his lightest thoughts were seldom commonplace—but vaguely; and, after a few questions addressed to the man who bore the ring, which he seemed unwilling to answer, the princess rendered her promise to liberate the Duke of Gueldres definite, and the messenger was suffered to depart.

At the meeting of the council, which followed immediately, the matter was discussed and concluded, and the orders to set the duke at liberty were instantly despatched. It was accompanied, however, by the express command of the princess—whose abhorrence for that base, unnatural son, turbulent subject, and faithless friend, was unconcealed—that he should immediately retire to his own domains, and never present himself before her.

More important matters occupied the council also. New tidings had been received from the frontiers; and all those tidings were evil. No doubt could now exist, that while his principal officers were invading the duchy of Burgundy in the east, Louis XI., with an overwhelming force, was marching onward towards Flanders, taking possession of all those fair lands which had descended to the unhappy princess at the death of her father, and meeting with little opposition on his way. Already Abbeville had thrown open its gates. Ham, Bohaim, St. Quentin, Roye, and Montdidier had followed; and Peronne—proud, impregnable Peronne—had been yielded at the first summons.

Again the Lord of Imbercourt boldly and strongly urged the absolute necessity of propitiating the King of France, and arresting his farther progress, by the immediate union, or at least affiancing, of the Princess of Burgundy and the heir of the French crown. It was the only means, he said—it was the only hope of preserving any part of the dominions, which, by various events, had been united under the coronet of Burgundy; and was it not better, he asked, for the princess to carry them as a dowry to her husband, than to come portion-

less to the same prince at last, and receive the honour of his alliance as a matter of grace and favour!

"My lords," replied Albert Maurice, rising as soon as the other had sat down, "already a thousand times have you heard my arguments against the base and ungenerous step proposed; often have I shown, by reasoning, that the interests of France and Burgundy are as distinct as it is possible to conceive, and that centuries must elapse before they can be united. But, if such be the case with the duchy of Burgundy itself, and all its immediate dependencies, how much more so is it the case with Flanders and Brabant. With England, the eternal enemy of France, has ever been our great commercial intercourse; to our friendship with England do we owe our commercial existence; and the moment that this land is united to the enemy of that great country, that moment our wealth, our prosperity, our being as a distinct land, are at an end. All this I have shown, taking a mere political view: but remembering that I spoke to knights and nobles, to men who can feel for national honour, and fear national disgrace, I have also pointed out the shame—the burning shame—that it would be in the eyes of all Christendom, the moment that your bold and gallant prince is dead, to truckle to his often worsted enemy; to yield to Louis the lands which Charles the Bold so stoutly maintained against him; and to give his daughter's hand to the son of that base foe, whose dark and traitorous intrigues effected, more than aught on earth, your sovereign's overthrow and death. Already have I demanded why, instead of all those degrading concessions, you do not prepare defences in the field, and, rather than talking of yielding tamely to an unjust tyrant, you do not go forth to encounter him with lance and sword, as in the days of the great duke. But now I must use another language —language more bold and more decided—and say that Flanders, Hainault, and Brabant will never consent to be the slaves of France,—France, who has so often wronged us, and whose efforts, vain as they have been, have never ceased to grasp at the dominion of these lands. More! I say—and by my voice the three united states now speak to the councils of Burgundy—that we will consider and pursue, as a false and perfidious traitor bought with the gold of France to betray his lady's interest, that man, whoever he may be, who henceforth

proposes the subjection of these lands to a French prince."

The Duke of Cleves eagerly supported the bold speech of the young citizen, as did also the Bishop of Liege—more perhaps from personal hatred to Imbercourt, than from any real disapprobation of the French alliance. Warm and violent words passed on all parts; and the discussion had reached a pitch of dangerous turbulence, when it was announced that the Count de Meulan, envoy extraordinary from the King of France, had just entered the city, and taken up his abode at the principal inn of the place.

This news gave a different turn to the deliberations of the council; and after determining that the reception of the ambassador should take place the following day, it broke up; and its various members separated, with those feelings of personal animosity burning in their bosoms which have so often proved fatal to great designs.

CHAPTER V.

About seven o'clock at night a post arrived in Ghent, bearing the unwelcome intelligence that Hesden, Montreuil, Boulogne, Cambray, and many other places, had yielded to the arms of France; that Philippe de Crèvecœur, the oldest and most tried servant of the house of Burgundy, had gone over to the enemy; and that Arras itself was lost to Flanders. Such were the tidings that reached Albert Maurice, while busily debating with Ganay, in a private chamber of the Hotel de Ville, the means of raising, as rapidly as possible, a large force for the defence of the country.

The messenger delivered the sealed packets into the hands of the young president, with notice that they were of the utmost importance; but, ere he opened them, Albert Maurice dismissed the bearer calmly, and finished the phrase which his entrance had interrupted. He then broke the seals, and read; and as he proceeded, notwithstanding his great command over his own feelings, it was clear, from the contraction of his brow, and

the quivering of his lip, that the tale therein written was any thing but pleasing.

Casting them on the table, after a moment's deep thought, the young citizen laid his hand sternly upon the papers, and, approaching the lamp towards them, pointed to the fatal tidings from Arras, saying to his keen companion, "This is sad! this is terrible! We must, if possible, keep this from the knowledge of the council till this pitiful ambassador has had his reply."

Ganay read the contents of the papers over, word by word; then raising his eyes to the face of his companion, and compressing his thin, bloodless lips, he replied, calmly but sternly, "Imbercourt must die!"

Albert Maurice started. "No, no! not so," replied he; "I am not one of those tigers, Ganay, to cross whose path is death. He may oppose me in the council; he may even thwart me in my plans; and yet not die, Ganay. But if he betray my country, his deed be upon his head. I will crush him with my heel, as I would a viper."

"Imbercourt must die!" reiterated Ganay, in the same stern, determined tone he had used before. "He *will* betray *your* country and *mine*,—and he dies. I have marked him well. I see his plans. He, like the traitors who have gone over before, will sell his country to France for French gold; and he must die. The only difference between him and this Philippe de Crèvecœur is, that the one, less cunning than the other, went over with nothing but his own brute courage to sell; while this Imbercourt, take my word for it, will carry, as merchandise to Louis of France, the hand of Mary of Burgundy, and the coronet of all these states."

"Never!" cried Albert Maurice, stung to the heart, as the other had intended, and striking his clenched hand upon the table; "never! My head or his shall whiten in the wind over the battlements of Ghent, before such a sacrifice be consummated."

The moment he had spoken, however, he felt that he had given Ganay an advantage; and well understanding that the game between him and his subtle comrade was one that admitted of no oversight, and that he must be as much upon his guard with his apparent friend as with a declared enemy, he hastened to turn the conversation from a topic on which he could not speak wisely. "We must think further," he said; "we must think further!

In the mean time," he added abruptly, "see you to this messenger, that he do not spread his news abroad before the reception of the worthy ambassador which Louis has deigned to send. I have that in yon cabinet which shall overthrow, at a word, all that his cunning can advance, were he as cunning as the fiend whose name he takes. At the same time, Ganay, I must trust to your zeal also, my friend, for the skilful management of our other purpose. This Duke of Gueldres you must render popular with the citizens, and oppose him strongly to the Duke of Cleves. Not too far, however; I would equally divide between them the power that the Duke of Cleves at present holds entire. Better it were, nevertheless, that the people over-favoured him of Gueldres than the other; for he has no hope. Every noble in the land would rise up against him; and, at the worst, it were but three passes of this steel"—and he touched the hilt of his sword—"to send him howling to the place he has so long deserved; and to win me the thanks of all the world, for ridding it of such a monster."

Notwithstanding all his care, Albert Maurice felt—and felt angrily—that the eager passions of his heart would burst forth, and display more of his real feelings and emotions than he was willing to expose. Ganay smiled, too, as he listened; and with his smiles there was always mingled a degree of mockery of the person who excited them, which rendered their meaning very doubtful.

"May I trust you?" demanded Albert Maurice, sternly.

"You may," answered the druggist. "Doubt me not; for with you, Albert Maurice, I am more frank a thousand-fold than with any other human being. We are like two men playing one game of chess against a whole host of adversaries; and it is necessary that we should see each other's moves. Your game I know, Albert; and mine, I do not seek to conceal from you; for it would be both useless and fatiguing. I will, then, do your bidding in regard to these two men of Cleves and Gueldres; and so play them off against each other, that they shall both combine, in their dissensions, to raise you to the height of your ambition."

He spoke boldly; and Albert Maurice felt that, for once at least, he spoke truly; though, perhaps, he saw

that notwithstanding they were in some sort partners in the game, as Ganay had depicted them, yet they were playing for different stakes, and might soon find that they had different interests.

"And when this game is won, Ganay," said he calmly, after a brief pause—"this game in which you and I stand as partners,—say, are we to turn round the board, and singly play one short game more, against each other?—Ha! is it not so?"

"No; on my life!" replied Ganay, with a degree of fervour unusual with him.—"No; on my life, young man. I have my passions, like my neighbours; but I am without ambition. Do *you*, too, believe me without a touch of feeling? You have shown me kindness in times past; you once saved the life of one that is now no more; three years ago you held my head when it throbbed with fever, when we were together on the shores of the Adriatic: and if you cross not my purpose—if you oppose not the stronger passion, which guides, and struggles with, and masters all—you shall find that my gratitude is only second to my revenge. Even more!" he added, resuming his ordinary air of calm shrewdness: "I can be even grateful for those things which I accomplish by your means—though without your will; and our common efforts for one great purpose bind us together more firmly than you think. So, now, farewell!—but remember, I tell you Imbercourt is a traitor—and he must die!"

"If he be a traitor, die most certainly he shall," replied Albert Maurice; "but in regard to that man, I mistrust my own motives too much to rely on my own judgment. More, Ganay!—still more!—I mistrust your motives too; and I will not rely on your judgment either. Nay, protest not! I see your bitter persevering hatred of that man as clearly as if your bosom were of glass, though I see not the occasion of it. But it matters not what be the occasion.—I doubt myself, and I doubt you; and others, more impartial than either you or I, shall judge him, though, God knows, I know no cause of enmity you can have towards him.—So now, farewell."

Ganay's lip curled with a very mingled expression, as Albert Maurice pronounced the last words, but he made no reply; and, leaving the young citizen, he proceeded to confer with the messenger who had lately

arrived, and then held a long and secret conference with Maillotin du Bac.

The post that brought such unwelcome tidings from the frontier supped well at the Maison de Ville, and resting his weary limbs upon his bed, soon found the sweet sleep of fatigue; nor did he ever stir from the precincts of the building. No one saw him without its gates; no one held conference with him within, except in the presence of Ganay himself. Nevertheless, before an hour had passed, the whole news he had brought were known to Imbercourt, and were by him carried straight to the princess. How it reached him it were hard to say, for no post came to the Cours du Prince from that quarter, but still he had learned it all. Not a word had escaped him,—the whole evil tidings were known, and the consternation was excited which Albert Maurice had been so desirous of warding off, till the ambassador from France had been received and dismissed. The views of the young citizen in this desire were certainly partly patriotic and partly personal; but his immediate object was to send back the messenger of the deceitful Louis with such a reply as would render the project of a union between France and Burgundy hopeless. Every fresh success of the French king of course strengthened the arguments of those who advocated the marriage of Mary with the dauphin, and this torrent of evil tidings was well calculated to overpower all opposition.

Such had been the light in which Albert Maurice had seen the progress of Louis; but in vain, however, did he take measures to conceal it: each event, rather magnified than otherwise, reached the ears of Imbercourt, and by him were that very night detailed to Mary herself. The news had reached Ghent not long before, that almost the whole of the duchy of Burgundy also had been overrun by French troops; and this, together with the unresisted advance of the French king on the side of Flanders, the total loss of Picardy, Artois, and the Boulonnois, the desertion of her friends, the turbulence of her subjects, and the power of her enemies, overcame at length the unhappy girl's hopes and her firmness. After a long conference with Imbercourt and her chancellor, as well as with her cousin, the Lord of Ravestein, and her best of friends, Margaret, her father's widow, in an evil hour Mary con-

sented to send the two former on a mission to the base monarch who was usurping her inheritance.

Under their dictation, with a trembling hand, *she* wrote part of a letter to Louis XI.; but where she came to give them power to treat of her alliance with France, her feelings overpowered her, and the tears, gushing from her eyes, obscured her sight.

"Give me the pen, my sweet child," said Margaret of York. "My Lord of Ravestein and myself, your two nearest relatives and friends, will each write a part under your direction: so shall the document acquire additional weight, as showing the wishes of so many persons."

This was accordingly done, and Mary calmly heard a paper read, which she felt was binding her to misery for life. With a hurried hand she signed her name, but she could bear no more, and hastened from the chamber.

"Poor child!" said Margaret of York. "Poor child! But now, my Lord of Imbercourt, lose not a moment. No communication with this coming ambassador will answer our purpose. You must see Louis himself; and treat with himself, and put forth all your wisdom to meet all his cunning. Hasten to Peronne; fear not to bloody your spurs on the road, for not a minute that flies, till you are before the King of France, may not serve to recall this most necessary paper."

While this determination was adopted by the counsellors, Mary was followed from the room by Alice of Imbercourt, and the moment she had reached her chamber, that princess cast herself upon the bosom of her fair attendant, and wept most bitterly. "Fear not, madam," whispered Alice, "fear not! You shall yet wed him you love."

Mary had never acknowledged her lingering hopes even to Alice of Imbercourt, perhaps hardly to her own heart. But now the more vehement passion overcame the milder feeling, and timidity was forgotten in grief.

"Never, Alice! never!" sobbed Mary; "I have just signed away my last and only chance!"

"Fear not!" again repeated the young lady. "Do you remember, madam, when you would not read the scheme of your future fate in the castle of Hannut?"

"Well, very well!" replied Mary, raising her head and drying her eyes; "what then, my Alice?"

"Do you remember, then, that I staid behind," continued her companion, "when you quitted my uncle's observatory? Well; I remained long enough to give you consolation even now; for I saw there written, that the coronet of an archduchess was to bind the brow of my fair mistress."

Mary drew a deep and doubtful sigh; but there was a bright blush rose also in her cheek, which might seem an augury of hope, and it were false to say that she did not derive some comfort even from the predictions of a science which, since the excitement of her visit to the castle of Hannut had worn away, she could hardly be said to believe.

At that period, however, each day of the life of Mary of Burgundy was a day of renewed care and anxiety; and the proceedings of the next morning opened with the tedious and painful ceremony of receiving the ambassador from the French monarch.

At the hour appointed it was announced that the Count de Meulan waited, and Mary took her seat in state, with the Bishop of Liege on one hand and the Duke of Cleves on the other, while Albert Maurice and various members of the council stood round. It had struck the young citizen, however, as soon as he entered the hall of audience, that neither Imbercourt nor Hugonet, the two chief supporters of what was called the French party, were present. And it appeared to him not a little extraordinary that they should be absent, if in the town, when such an opportunity for showing their respect to the King of France occurred, as the public reception of his envoy. During the time that elapsed between his own arrival and the announcement of the ambassador, he asked frequently, but in vain, for the absent counsellors; and on every movement near the door looked for their appearance, supposing that the business of the day could not or would not proceed without their presence. He was not a little surprised, however, when the order for admitting the Count de Meulan was at length given without their appearance.

The doors were soon thrown open; and, dressed in the excess of splendour, but with a certain crouching and stealthy pace, habitual to the barber of the most cunning king in Europe, Olivier le Dain entered the hall, and approached the chair of the princess. After

the ceremony of his introduction, which he went through, not without grace, but without dignity, the ambassador was commanded to deliver his letters, which he accordingly did. These were found to be in full and correct form, and he was then directed to state the purport of his embassy, and what he was charged to communicate to the Princess of Burgundy, from her cousin the King of France.

Here, however, the envoy hesitated; and, after a moment's thought, replied in a low soft voice, that he was directed by his master, Louis, the most Christian king, to explain his views and wishes to his beloved cousin and god-daughter, the Princess Mary, in private, and to her alone. He therefore, he said, craved a private audience, in which his communication should be more full and complete.

The Bishop of Liege,—whose territories lay too near the French frontier, and whose interests were too nearly connected with those of France to suffer him to feel any great personal interest in the distinct rights of the house of Burgundy,—had hitherto been the person who spoke on the part of the princess. He of course had evinced every sort of respect for the ambassador of the French king; but at this point the Duke of Cleves broke in; and with a haughty and contemptuous tone, informed the Count de Meulan, that what he demanded was not consistent with the customs of the court of Burgundy. He must, therefore, he said, declare openly his errand to the princess surrounded by her council, for no other proceeding could be permitted.

Again the ambassador hesitated: uttering several sentences, from which—though loaded with fine and sounding words, and gilded with a show of argument—all that could be gathered was, that the open communication required by the council was contrary to his monarch's commands. He then seemed about to retire; but at that moment Albert Maurice advanced a little before the rest, and craved leave to explain the object and views of the ambassador, which that functionary seemed to have so much difficulty in doing for himself. The assembled court, and the ambassador himself, gazed on him with some surprise; but the young citizen proceeded.

"In the first place," he said, "your grace will be glad to hear who is the noble envoy whom that mighty

arch Louis, king of France, thinks fit to send to the
t of Burgundy—to the daughter of that great prince
overthrew him in the field by valour and skill, and
foiled him in the cabinet by decision and boldness.
w me, in the man who calls himself Count de
lan, to introduce to your notice Olivier le Dain, or
ome called Le Méchant, barber to the most Christian
, born at Thielt, and serving as a barber's boy at
velt, near this city."—A roar of laughter burst from
nobles of Burgundy; and Albert Maurice proceeded,
ing his hand to the door-keepers to prevent the
er from making his exit too rapidly. "Do not let
worthy ambassador depart till he has heard me ex-
n the object of his coming. I hold here in my hand,
he favour of some unknown friend who sent these
rs to me, a copy of the private instructions of the
; of France to the *barber ambassador*, which direct
strictly, to keep the princess and the court of Bur-
ly engaged in long and tedious negotiations, while
trives in private to persuade the people of Ghent
ivite the King of France to enter their territory.
s further ordered to spare no means, neither money
promises, to make the good men of this city declare
he King of France, and throw off the authority of
lawful sovereign. To this, by your grace's per-
ion, I, as the only individual of the burgher class
is presence, will take upon me to reply, that Louis,
; of France, mistakes entirely the character and dis-
ion of the men of Ghent; for, though they may be
ous to preserve their own liberties and privileges,
are no less anxious to preserve the legitimate au-
ity of their sovereign; and, though they are never
osed to submit to tyranny from their own princes,
are no less determined to resist all foreign domi-
n. Let him learn that he can neither buy us with
old, nor fool us with his promises; and that his in-
es and offers will be equally in vain with the men
hent. It is for you, my lords," he continued,
ing to the members of the council present, "as older
, and more experienced in the ways of courts than
elf,—it is for you to judge what course ought to be
ued towards a man who comes as ambassador to a
reign prince; and, at the same time, undertakes to
ce the subjects of that prince from their allegiance
ho aproaches the presence of an oppressed prin-

cess, from the man who is robbing her of her territories and massacring her subjects, affecting in words and in style to negotiate with her as the messenger of a friend and a relation, while his real errand is to excite treason among her people, and to bribe her citizens to revolt. It is for you, my lords, I say, to judge what is to be done with the caitiff who undertakes such a commission for such a man!"

"Nail his ears to the door-post," cried the Lord of Vere, an impetuous noble of North Zealand.

"Throw him into the river!" cried the Duke of Cleves; "such treatment does he well deserve."

Various such pleasant modes of disposing of the person of the barber ambassador were suggested by different members of the council, probably without any intention of carrying them into effect. They were not, however, without producing some impression, and that of no very agreeable nature, upon the mind of Olivier le Dain himself. That worthy personage had listened to the speech of Albert Maurice in downcast silence. No flush betrayed his agitation or shame, though his lip quivered a little, and at one time he took two or three steps towards the door. But when he heard the many unceremonious methods of treatment proposed, he gradually crept back till he was within a step of the entrance of the chamber. His face was still turned towards the council; and he still seemed listening attentively to the somewhat bitter strictures which were passing upon his own conduct; but he showed no inclination to retreat farther than was absolutely necessary to keep himself out of the reach of violent hands, so that the door-keepers were off their guard. As the Duke of Cleves spoke, the barber paused and listened, gave a furtive glance over his shoulder; and then, without any effort towards taking leave, he darted out of the presence at once, reached the court-yard, mounted his horse, and galloped away to the inn where he had lodged.

Before he arrived at that building, however, he had begun to feel that his apprehensions of any personal violence had probably been a little too hasty; and a loud laugh, that he remembered to have heard as he quitted the audience-hall, confirmed him in that opinion. The calm reflection of a few hours, during which he seemed totally forgotten by the whole town, refreshed his

courage and reanimated his hopes; and, therefore, not to abandon his purpose without another effort, he ventured to ride out in the evening; but the moment that he presented himself in the streets, he was greeted with so much mockery and laughter, that he soon found the attempt would be vain. A full account of his birth and situation had been industriously circulated among the people during the day; and as nothing excites the hatred and contempt of the populace more than to see a person sprung from among themselves affecting the airs and splendour of a class above them, they were all prepared to shower upon his head every sort of ridicule and abuse. No sooner did he appear in the streets, than this determination to insult and annoy him in every different way began to manifest itself among the people. One held a pewter basin before his horse's head; another lifted up his rugged chin, and begged that his highness would shave him, just to keep his hand in; and a third exclaimed, that he must not think to lead the people of Ghent by the nose, though he might often have taken the King of France by that organ.

Just while he was turning away from these unpleasant salutations, in order to return as fast as possible to his hotel, some shouts met his ear, which seemed rapidly coming nearer, and in a moment after he perceived half a dozen horsemen cantering easily down the street, with a number of men and boys running by the sides of the horses, shouting loudly, "Long live the Duke of Gueldres! long live the noble Duke of Gueldres!" The horseman at their head was a powerful handsome man, of about fifty, with a coarse but bold expression of countenance, but still possessing that easy air of dignity and command which is a part of the education of princes. Some one, as the cavalcade approached, recognising the person of the French ambassador by his splendid dress and gaudy train, shouted out the name and various opposite occupations of Master Olivier le Dain; and the Duke of Gueldres, dashing on, drove his horse rudely against that of the unfortunate barber, which reared with the stroke, and almost plunged him into the canal, near which they were riding.

"Ha, ha! master barber," shouted the duke, in the coarse and brutal tone which he usually employed when he had no purpose to answer which might require softer

speech; "thou canst never shave without water, man, but there is plenty in the canal."

The populace roared their applause, and, while Olivier le Dain, keeping his seat with difficulty, made the best of his way back to his inn, and thence for ever out of the gates of Ghent, the Duke of Gueldres rode on, nor stopped till he sprang from his horse at the house of Albert Maurice.

Representatives from all the different cities of that part of Belgium which was then under the dominion of Burgundy had arrived in Ghent the day before; and at the moment that the Duke of Gueldres approached, the young president was in the act of despatching a deputation to Louis XI., then encamped at Arras. Albert Maurice, be it remarked, went not himself; but at the head of the deputation, on the part of Ghent, was the druggist Ganay.

The Duke of Gueldres found the street before the young citizen's house crowded with horses and horse-boys; and the different chambers of the house itself filled with the attendants of the deputies and the officers of the city—messengers, visiters, soldiers, and spectators—displayed a spectacle more like the palace of a sovereign prince than the house of a simple merchant in a Flemish town.

"By my faith," the duke muttered, as he walked on amid robes and embroidery, and gold chains, and furred gowns, "times have strangely changed with the good city of Ghent, since that cursed tyrant shut me up in his old stone rat-trap. Which is Master Albert Maurice?" he then demanded of a merchant who was passing out; "which is the grand bailli—which is the president of the municipal council?"

"Yonder he stands at the head of the table," replied the merchant, "speaking with the deputies of Utrecht and Bruges."

At that moment the eye of the young citizen fell upon the Duke of Gueldres; and—though he was unannounced, and Albert Maurice had never beheld him before—either from having heard his personal appearance described, or from having seen some picture of him, the burgher at once recognised the prince, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

The Duke of Gueldres was surprised to behold so young a man chosen from among the jealous an l factious citizens of Ghent to wield the chief authority of the

city, to fill two of the most important offices, and to influence so strongly the councils of all Flanders; but he was still more surprised to find that high and dignified tone in the merchant which so well became his station. He had been prepared to see the president in possession of vast power, but he now perceived that his power was greatly derived from his superiority to his class, and he at once saw the necessity of suiting his demeanour—for the time at least—to the man. With a degree of suavity which no one knew better how to assume, when it answered his purpose, than Adolphus Duke of Gueldres, that base and brutal prince, now, with his manner softened down to an appearance of mere generous frankness, thanked the young citizen for his liberation, and told him that he had good reason to know that the happy event was solely owing to his intervention.

Albert Maurice at once gracefully complimented the duke on his enlargement, and disclaimed all title to gratitude for an act which, he said, emanated from the princess herself. He had, he acknowledged, strongly advised her to the course she had pursued, when she had condescended to consult him upon the subject; but he assured the duke that she had done so first, before he had ventured to propose such a proceeding.

"Well, well," replied the duke, "I knew not that my fair cousin was so generous, but I will kiss her pretty cheek in token of my thanks, which, perhaps, she will think no unpleasant way of showing one's gratitude."

The blood rushed up to the temples of the young citizen, but he made no reply, and merely bowed low. He then begged the duke to excuse him for a few moments, while he concluded the business in which he had been engaged. The prince replied that he would detain him no longer; and Albert Maurice, with cold and formal courtesy, suffered him to depart—from that moment either a secret or an avowed enemy. As soon as he was gone, the young citizen took leave of the deputies, besought them to make all speed to meet the king, and directed them to beg him—without hastening on to plunge the two nations in long and inveterate war—to halt his armies, till such time as the States General could devise and propose to his majesty some fair means of general pacification.

He then gave into the hands of Ganay a letter, fully authorizing the deputation to treat, in the name of the

princess,—which instrument had been unwillingly wrung from Mary during the morning, notwithstanding the secret powers which she had so lately given to Imbercourt and Hugonet. To this Albert Maurice added a private injunction, to trace and discover all the movements of the two ministers, whose absence from the council of that day he had remarked: and there was a sort of fierce and flashing eagerness in the eye of the young citizen, as he spoke this in a low whisper, which the druggist marked with pleasure and expectation.*

The result of this deputation to the crafty monarch of France is so well known, that it needs but short recapitulation. Louis received the members of the Belgian states with all civility, and treated them individually with distinction; as that wily monarch well knew, that through the intervention of such men alone he could hope to win that extensive territory which he was striving to add to France. At the same time, he positively refused to treat with them in their official capacity, and affected, at first, a degree of mystery in regard to his reasons, assigning a thousand vague and unreasonable motives for so doing, which he well knew would not be believed for a moment; but which he was aware would induce the deputies—encouraged by his homely and good-humoured manner—to press so strongly for a further explanation, as to afford him some excuse for the base treachery he meditated against their sovereign.

The deputies fell into the trap he laid; made use of every argument to induce him to negotiate with them upon the powers they had received from their several cities; and finally urged, that if he would not acknowledge them as the representatives of the towns of Flanders, Hainault, and Brabant, he must at least consent to receive them as ambassadors from the young Duchess of Burgundy, whose letters of authority they then tendered.

Still, however, Louis refused; and, at length, as if worn out by importunity, he said, "My good friends of Ghent and the other towns of Flanders, you must very well know, from my whole conduct towards you, that I

* The proceedings of the municipal council of Ghent, even before the assembling of the States, which it entirely commanded, were in many instances much more bold and tyrannical than any that it has seemed necessary to particularize here. Some authors assert that it forbade Mary to transact any public business without its sanction.

would rather treat with you than with any other persons. I am a plain man, and love to deal with plain citizens; but you are entirely mistaken in supposing that you possess the confidence of my dear god-child Mary Duchess of Burgundy, or that you are really authorized to treat for her. It is not impossible," he added, with a self-satisfied and yet mysterious air, "it is not at all impossible, that, were I so disposed, I might show you a letter, written partly in her own hand, partly in that of the duchess dowager, and partly in that of the good Lord of Ravestein, directing me to place confidence in no persons but my excellent good friends and faithful servants the Lord of Imbercourt, and William de Hugonet, Chancellor of Burgundy, who were both with me at Peronne for many hours some nights ago, and are by this time back again in Ghent."

The deputies, confounded and surprised, expressed, in the first heat of their astonishment, a very uncourtly doubt of the truth of the king's statement; and Louis, affecting to consider his honour impugned, committed one of the basest acts of the many that stain his memory, and produced the private letter of the Princess Mary to the eyes of her turbulent and headstrong subjects. Furious with indignation and disappointment, the deputies retired from the presence of the king, without having concluded any thing, and journeyed on with all speed towards Ghent, neglecting the great and vital business of the moment, in order to plunge forward into fresh scenes of anarchy and confusion.

Louis saw them depart with scorn and triumph; and, as proud of his successful villany as ever conqueror was of a final victory, he marched on to new successes in every direction, satisfied that, in the discontented spirit of the people of Ghent, he had a faithful ally that not even self-interest could sever from him.

CHAPTER VI.

It is wonderful, though common to a proverb, that days of sunshiny brightness and placid tranquillity should so often precede great convulsions in the natural and the political world; and that although "coming events do throw their shadows before them," yet that the storm, when it does come, should almost always find the world all smiling, and the birds in song.

The day after the return of the deputation from Arras, the aspect of the city of Ghent was more like that which it had been during the most brilliant days of Philippe the Good and Charles the Bold than it had appeared for many months. The shops and booths, which projected into the street, and which, being totally unprovided with any means of defence against popular violence, were generally closed in times of tumult and disturbance, were now again all open, and full of their finest wares. Mountebanks of different grades, and those who sold books, and repeated verses, were exercising their usual vocations at the corners of the streets. Burghers and their wives, lords and ladies, artisans and peasantry, all in their gayest dresses,—for it was one of the high festivals of the year,—moved about in the streets; and, to crown all, the foul weather had disappeared, and the sun shone out with a warm and promising beam.

A great multitude had collected near the palace gates, to see the different members of the council, and the deputies from the various cities and states of Flanders and Brabant, proceed in state to visit the Princess Mary; and the approbation of the crowd—often depending not a little upon the splendour of the several trains—was loudly expressed as their peculiar favourites approached the gates of the great court. At the same time it was remarkable, that though loud and vociferous in their applause, the multitude restrained all marks of disapprobation on the appearance of persons supposed to be unpopular, with wonderful and unexpected moderation.

Since the first effervescence of feeling had subsided,

after the defeat of Nancy and the death of Charles the Bold, and since the apprehension of immediate revolt had gone by, the ministers of Mary of Burgundy,—or, to speak more correctly, the members of the provincial council of Flanders,—though spending the greater part of the day in the palace, had generally returned to inhabit their own hotels at night. Thus, almost every one but the Lord of Ravestein, who remained in the palace with his cousin, had to traverse the crowd in their way to the audience hall. Imbercourt and Hugonet, neither of whom had ever been very popular, passed amid profound silence, and Maillotin du Bac, who, in his official dress as prévot, was riding about the ground, took no small credit to himself for saving those two noblemen from some sort of insult. The Duke of Cleves, again, was loudly cheered; but the Duke of Gueldres, who, by some means unknown even to himself, had acquired an extraordinary degree of popularity during the short time which had elapsed since his return to the city, received a degree of applause that far outdid that which greeted the Duke of Cleves. Albert Maurice, however, as the great favourite of the people, and one whom they considered more peculiarly as their own representative, was received with loud, long-continued, and reiterated shouts. Indeed, as he rode on upon a splendid and fiery horse, dressed in magnificent apparel —not only as president of the council of Ghent and grand bailli of the city, but as holding, in the capacity of chief pensionary, the presidency of the States General of Flanders,* and followed as such by a number of guards and attendants—with his lordly air and his beautiful person, he looked more like some mighty prince going to claim his bride, than a simple merchant about to appear before his sovereign.

The visit was one of ceremony, and as no business of importance was to be transacted, the princess received her court in state; and, to see the splendour with which she was surrounded, the guards, the attendants, the kneeling subjects, no one would have supposed that Mary of Burgundy was less a free agent than the meanest subject in her capital.

All who presented themselves before the princess

* When the states of Flanders assembled in Ghent, which was generally the case, either the chief pensionary or the chief eschevin of that city presided in the assembly as a matter of right.

were received with affability and courtesy, with the one exception of the Duke of Gueldres, from whom, as he approached the chair of state, she seemed to shrink with a repulsive abhorrence, which she could in no degree command. Although he appeared there contrary to her commands, she strove to say something kind in regard to his liberation, and to smile as he offered his thanks; but the words died away before they were uttered, and the smile faded upon her lip as soon as it appeared. To Imbercourt and Hugonet, the Lord of Vere and others, who supported the French alliance—although they had so strongly pressed her to sacrifice all her own personal feelings, and to abandon the hope of happiness for life—she still, from a deep conviction of the honesty of their intentions, and from long habits of regard, yielded the same marks of friendship and affection with which she had always distinguished the counsellors and friends of her father, however much their advice to him or to herself had been at times opposed to her own opinion, or to her dearest wishes. On Albert Maurice, too, as the boldest and strongest supporter of her own wishes against the voice of her more politic advisers, and as the leader of those who really ruled in Flanders, she smiled sweetly, from a feeling of gratitude as well as esteem; and none who beheld the young citizen in the midst of that splendid court could help acknowledging that he was well fitted, in appearance at least, to take his place among the noblest and most courtly of the land. His mien had all the calm dignity of power and the easy grace of confident but not presuming self-possession. There was also a freshness and variety in his words and actions, which, springing from a rich and generous mind, gave a sparkling grace to the whole of his demeanour, and rendered it at once striking and pleasing. There was certainly a difference in his manners from that of the stiff and stately nobles of the court of Burgundy; but it was slight, and to his advantage, characterized by no want of grace or dignity, but rather by the calm ease of natural politeness, as opposed to the acquired formality of courtly etiquette. It seemed, not that he was assuming a rank and mingling amid a class to which he did not belong—but rather as if he had suddenly taken possession of a station which was his own by the indefeasible right of ennobling nature. The respect and deference also with which all the rest of the court felt them-

selves obliged to treat him, both from his authority over the people and the powers of his own mind, placed him more at his ease; and perhaps the very excitement which he felt under the eyes of Mary of Burgundy, and the mighty aspirations and brilliant hopes which thrilled in his bosom, were not without their share in giving firmness and dignity to the step with which he trod the ducal halls of the house of Burgundy.

Thus passed by the morning; and every thing proceeded in undisturbed harmony and tranquillity, both within the *Cours du Prince*, and without its walls. The populace showed themselves calm and placable; and it had seldom happened of late that so many nobles and statesmen, of different opinions and different interests, had met within the gates of that palace with so little jarring and contention. Nevertheless, there were things observed by many of the keen eyes which hang about courts, and watch the flickering signs of the times, that boded events not quite so pacific and gentle as the first aspect of affairs might augur. Between Albert Maurice and the Lord of Imbercourt no words passed; and as their glances encountered upon more than one occasion, the lordly brow of the young citizen became overcast, and a fire blazed up in his eye, which spoke no very cordial feeling towards that nobleman. Imbercourt himself, whose demeanour through life had always been characterized by calm gravity, which, without absolutely approaching to sadness, had been still further removed from cheerfulness, had—since the death of his master—shown himself more gloomy and reserved than he had ever before appeared; and, on the present occasion, also, there was a deep immoveable sternness in his countenance, which had something in it more profound than can be expressed by the word melancholy. He met the fiery glance of the young citizen, however, calm and unchanged. His eyelid never fell, his brow contracted not a line, his lip remained unmoved. Not a trace of emotion of any kind passed over his face, as he endured rather than returned the gaze of the young citizen; and, after remaining a few minutes in the princess's presence, he took his leave, mounted his horse, and rode homewards. But as he passed by Maillotin du Bac, and addressed some common observation to that officer, there was a sort of triumphant sneer on the hard countenance of the prévôt, and an unnatural degree of court-

esy in his manner from which those who saw it inferred no very favourable anticipations in his mind regarding the Lord of Imbercourt.

When the whole ceremony was over, and Mary of Burgundy was left alone with Alice of Imbercourt, and a few of her other attendants, her heart seemed lightened of a load, and a smile, which approached the expression of happiness, brightened her countenance for the first time since her father's death.

"Thank God, Alice," she said, "that it is over. I was very anxious about the passing by of this morning, for I feared much that some angry clashing might have taken place, concerning the messengers despatched to the cruel King of France. But you are sad, Alice," she continued,—seeing the fair face of her gay friend overcast with unusual clouds, which probably had arisen from the increased gloom she had observed upon the countenance of her father: "you are sad, Alice,—you, whose gay and happy spirit seems formed by heaven to bear up against every thing."

"I know not well how it is, your grace," replied Alice, with a sigh; "nothing particular has happened to make me so; and yet, I own, my heart feels more gloomy than it generally does on such a sunshiny day."

"Nay, Alice," replied the princess, "you must be sad, indeed, to call Mary of Burgundy, 'your grace,' when from our earliest years we have grown up together as sisters more than friends. But be not gloomy, dear Alice; all will, I trust, go well. There is not that evil, in all this sorrowful world, which could shake my trust in an overruling Providence, or make me doubt that the end will yet be good."

"But sorrows must sometimes happen," replied Alice; "and in that book,—which I wish I had never looked into,—in the cabinet at Hannut, I saw that some time soon you were to lose two faithful friends: I wonder if I shall be one."

"Heaven forbid! dear Alice," replied the princess. "However, I am sorry that you have told me;" and she fell into a deep and somewhat painful revery, from which she only roused herself to propose that they should go and visit the Dowager-duchess Margaret, who inhabited the other wing of the building.

Alice willingly followed; and the duchess—though, in her grief and widowhood, she had taken no part in the

ceremonies of the day—received her fair visiters with gladness, and inquired with some anxiety how the morning and its events had passed away. Margaret's mind was of that firm and equable, though gentle tone, which feels every misfortune intensely, but bears it with unshaken resolution; and it is a quality of such minds to communicate a part of their own tranquil and enduring power to others with whom they are brought in contact. Thus Mary of Burgundy always felt more calm and more resigned after conversing long with Margaret of York than before; and if, in the present instance, her design in visiting her stepmother was to derive some such support, she was not disappointed. Both herself and Alice of Imbercourt returned from the apartments of the duchess less gloomy than when they went; and the vague omens which had given rise to their melancholy were dropped and forgotten, especially as nothing occurred during the rest of the morning to recall them to the mind of either the princess or her fair attendant. The day went by in peace and tranquillity. The multitudes dispersed and retired to their own homes. The brief sunshine of a winter's day soon lapsed into the dark, cold night; and a thick white fog, rolling densely up from the many rivers and canals that intersect the town of Ghent, rendered all the streets doubly obscure. Several of the hours of darkness also went by in tranquillity: though the glare of many torches, lighting various groups of persons, through the dim and vapoury atmosphere, and casting round them a red and misty halo of circumscribed light, together with the shouting voices of people who had lost their way, and the equally loud replies of those who strove to set them right, broke occasionally upon the still quiet of the streets of Ghent, during the course of the evening.

All this, too, passed away, and the hour approached for resigning the body and the mind to that mysterious state of unconscious apathy, which seems given to show that we can die, as far as sentient being goes, and yet live again, after a brief pause of mental extinction. Mary of Burgundy, whose days—if ever the days of mortal being did so—should have passed in peace, was about to retire to rest, thanking Heaven that one more scene in life's long tragedy was over. Her fair hair was cast over her shoulders, in soft and silky waves, and she was thinking—with the natural comment of sorrow upon

human life—"how sweet a thing is repose!" Although she had assumed in public the state of a sovereign princess, in private she had hitherto dispensed with that burdensome etiquette, which renders the domestic hours of princes little less tedious than their public ceremonies. Her ladies were all dismissed to rest before she herself retired to her own apartment, and two tire-women of inferior rank were all that remained to aid her preparation for repose. Those women, whose whole intellects were composed of the thoughts of dress and ornament, contented themselves with performing their several offices about the person of the princess, and leaving her mind to reflection. Thus, perhaps, the hour which she spent each night in her own chamber, ere she lay down to rest, was one of the sweetest portions of time to Mary of Burgundy. It was the hour in which her heart, relieved from all the pressure of the day, could commune with itself at ease; and could one have looked into her thoughts on that or any other night, the whole course of her life gives reason to believe that they would have displayed as fine and pure a tissue of sweet and noble ideas as ever the mind of woman wove. Her toilet for the night, however, had proceeded but a short way, on the present occasion, when the door of the chamber was thrown open with unceremonious haste, and Alice of Imbercourt, pale, agitated, trembling, with her own brown hair streaming over her shoulders like that of the princess; and showing how sudden had been the news that so affected her, rushed into the apartment, and, casting herself upon her knees before Mary, hid her eyes upon the lap of the princess, and wept so bitterly as to deprive herself of utterance.

"What is the matter, my dear Alice? What is the matter, my sweet girl?" demanded Mary, anxiously. "Speak, speak, dear Alice! what has happened so to affect you?"

"Oh, madam, madam!" sobbed Alice: "my father—my dear father!"

"What of him?" exclaimed Mary, turning deadly pale. "What has happened to him, Alice? tell me, I beseech you."

"Oh, madam, they have arrested him and the Lord of Hugonet!" replied Alice, "and have dragged them from their beds, loaded with chains, to the town-prison!"

"Good God!" cried Mary, clasping her hands; "will

they deprive me of all my friends? Has not the gold of Louis tempted all feeble hearts from my service, and will my own subjects take from me the only ones who have been found firm?"

"They will kill them,—depend upon it, they will kill them!" cried Alice. "There is only one person on earth can save them; and, alas! I fear that these butchers of Ghent will be too quick in their murder for him to come."

"Who do you mean, dear girl?" cried Mary. "Who is there you think can aid them? Who do you propose? Let us lose no time; but take any way to save their lives. Some one," she added, turning to her tire-women, "go to my mother, the duchess; tell her I would fain speak with her.—Now, Alice, what way do you propose?"

"Oh, let me go!" cried Alice, wildly, "let me go! Let me lose not a moment of time! I will easily find him out, or send on messengers, or bring him by some way! Let me go, I beg—I entreat!"

"But of whom do you speak?" again demanded Mary. "You forget, dear Alice, I know not what you mean."

"I mean!" replied Alice, while a slight blush passed rapidly over her countenance, and was immediately again succeeded by the eager and terrified paleness which had before appeared there,—"I mean—I mean the Vert Gallant of Hannut. 'Tis scarce three days ago, that, by a letter from Hannut, Hugh de Mortmar bade me seek aid and assistance from him, if any thing happened in the tumult of this city, to cause me danger or distress. He said that the Vert Gallant owed him much. Let me go, madam, I beseech you."

"But you cannot go alone, dear Alice," replied the princess, gazing upon her almost as much bewildered as she was herself; "you cannot go alone, and at this hour of the night. At all events, you must have a party of the guards."

"Oh, no, no," cried Alice; "they will only let one person pass through the gates at a time: and there are men here set to watch the river, so that no large boat can pass."

At this moment the dowager-duchess of Burgundy entered the chamber of her step-daughter; and Mary was beginning to explain the circumstances, as far as she had been able to gather them from her terrified

companion, when she found that Margaret was already acquainted with many more particulars concerning the arrest of Imbercourt and Hugonet than even herself. So daring an act on the part of the turbulent men of Ghent as the arrest of two members of the supreme council of Flanders of course terrified and shocked both Mary and her step-mother. But their personal apprehensions for the future, and consideration of the long series of calamities and horrors which such a deed portended, were overpowered by the wild agony of the daughter of one of those victims of popular sedition. The tears poured over her cheeks, her fair hands clasped in convulsive agony, till the taper fingers seemed as if they would have broken; and still she besought the princess, with wild eagerness, to permit her instant departure in search of him on whose assistance she seemed to place her only hope of delivering her father.

Mary called upon her step-mother to second her reasonings with Alice, for the purpose of persuading her to take some protection and assistance, at least, with her, in her attempt to escape from the town, and in the difficult search she proposed for one whose character was so doubtful, and whose dwelling was so uncertain. But Margaret, animated by a bolder spirit, saw the proposal in a different light, and supported strongly the desire of Alice to seek the assistance she hoped for, accompanied alone by the page.

"Great things," she said, "have been done by less men than this adventurer seems to be. Many a battle between York and Lancaster has been won by the aid of foresters and outlaws. If you can once secure his assistance, and he can, by any of those strange means which he has been often known to employ so successfully, introduce his bands within the town, these rebellious men of Ghent may yet be taught a lesson which they have much need to learn. Go, then, my poor girl, if you have any even probable means of discovering the abode of him you seek. Take the page with you; furnish yourself with all the money and jewels which you can collect. The princess and I will do our best to contribute; for, with such men, gold is better than eloquence; and, at all events, you will have the satisfaction of doing your duty towards your father."

"In the mean time, Alice," added Mary, "be not more anxious than you can help for your father's safety.

These men will, doubtless, never attempt any thing against his life without bringing him to trial. All the preparations must take long, and I will leave no means unused to delay their proceedings, and to mitigate their rancour. I will send for the president; I will speak with him myself. I will entreat, I will beseech, I will rather lay down my own life than that they should hurt my faithful servants."

"Thank you! thank you, dear lady!" replied Alice, kissing her hand; "thank you, thank you for your comfort! But I must go," she added, with eager anxiety; "I must not lose a moment."

"Stay, stay!" said the young duchess, seeing her about to depart. "Let Bertha call the page whom we employed before, and we will determine on some better plans than your own unassisted fancy can frame."

It would be unnecessary here to enter into the minute details of all that ensued; and, indeed, so rapidly were the arrangements concluded, that many words would only serve to give a false impression of things that were resolved and executed in a few brief moments. Suffice it, then, that the page was soon brought to the presence of the princess; and, in eager and hasty consultation, it was determined that he should proceed in search of a small skiff, which being brought opposite to the palace wall, on the water side, would enable Alice to make her escape with less chance of observation than if she attempted to pass the gates either on horseback or on foot at that hour of the night.

No large boat would be allowed to pass, and therefore he was directed to seek the smallest that he could possibly find; but, at the same time, to use all his shrewdness in endeavouring to discover some boatman who was either trustworthy by native honesty, or might be rendered secret by a bribe. The boy at once declared, in reply, that he well knew a man who used to bring the duke's venison up from the woods, and whose taciturnity was so great that those who knew him averred that he had never said ten words to anybody yet, nor ever would say ten words more.

In search of this very desirable person the page instantly proceeded; but, either from the darkness of the night, or from having found it difficult to wake the boatman out of his first sleep, the boy was so long in returning that all Alice's preparations for her journey were

completed, and many minutes spent in agonizing anxiety, ere he reappeared. When he did come, however, he brought the glad tidings that all was ready, and, after taking leave of the princess, with a rapid but silent step Alice threaded the dark and intricate passages of the palace, passed the postern unquestioned, and finding her way with difficulty through the dim and foggy air to the steps which led towards the water, she found herself at last by the side of the boat. Stepping forward over some unsteady planks, she was speedily seated in the stern, with the boy beside her. The single boatman, whom they had found waiting, pushed silently away from the bank, and, in a minute after, the skiff was making its slow way through the fog, down the dull current of the Scheldt.

CHAPTER VII.

Although other matters of some moment might claim attention in this place, we will not interrupt the course of our narrative, but will follow on, throughout her journey, the fair fugitive from the city of Ghent; as far, at least, as that journey was permitted to proceed uninterrupted.

The boat glided along over the calm dull bosom of the Scheldt, with hardly any noise, except the occasional dip of the oar in the water, and the slight creaking of the gunwale as the rower plied his stroke. As every one knows, the river which, a little distance farther down its stream, assumes so much importance as to be the object of intrigue, negotiation, and even war to rival nations, presents no very imposing aspect in the neighbourhood of Ghent; but so gloomy was the moonless sky, and so dense was the heavy fog that hung over the waters, that from the moment the boat had pushed off from the quay both banks became quite invisible. The deep, misty obscurity of the atmosphere, and the profound darkness of the night, might have been a cause of terror to Alice of Imbercourt under any other circumstances; but now all apprehensions of danger from the want of light, and the difficulties of the navigation,

were swallowed up in the fear of being overtaken or impeded in her escape; and the impenetrable veil which seemed to cover all things around her she looked upon as a blessing, in the hope that it would also conceal herself. The darkness, however, which gave this feeling of security did not continue so uninterrupted as to leave her entirely without alarm. Now and then, as the boat shot past some of the warehouses or the quays, where the larger craft were moored, an indistinct dim line of light would break across the mist from lamp or lantern, hung up to show the late watcher the objects of his toil or of his anxiety; and the heart of poor Alice would beat quick with fear, lest the skiff, or those it contained, should attract the eye of any of the eager and wary citizens. But all this was soon past; the boatman rowed strongly and well; the slow current with which they were proceeding was not powerful enough to afford much assistance to his exertions, but still the boat skimmed swiftly along the waters, and ere long the last bridge was passed. Beyond it there extended along the banks a short suburb, terminated by scattered houses belonging to cow-feeders and gardeners, and forming a sort of brief connecting link between the wide open country and the fortified city; and farther on, again, came the rich fields and meadows in the immediate vicinity of the town, blending gradually into the thick woods that at that time commenced about Heusden and Melle.

Alice's heart beat more freely, as the fresher air, the slight clearing away of the mist, the occasional lowing of the cattle, and that indescribable feeling of expanse which is only known in the country, showed her—though she could not yet see the objects on the banks—that she had passed beyond the limits of the city of Ghent. The page, too, felt the same relief, and, for the first time, ventured a whispered observation on the good fortune that had attended their movements. But Alice was still too fearful of being pursued or discovered, to make any reply but by commanding him to silence; and no further sound marked their course but the stroke of the oars, as the sturdy boatman impelled them on, unwearied, over the waters of the Scheldt.

At the distance of about three miles from the city the air became gradually less dense, and at the end of half a mile more the fog had cleared away entirely. It

was still dark, but the stars afforded sufficient light to show the fair fugitive and her companion that they were passing through a country where the meadow and the cornfield were gradually merging into the forest. Scattered patches of copse and underwood, mingled with fields which had been reclaimed to the use of man, came sweeping down to the banks of the river, and straight before the travellers lay a dark and shadowy track, broken into dense, heavy masses, the rounded forms of which, cutting black upon the lighter sky beyond, distinguished it as wood, from the soft sweeping lines of the uplands which in other directions marked the horizon.

There is scarcely any thing on earth more gloomy and impressive than the aspect of a deep wood by night, with just sufficient light in the sky to contrast strongly with the stern body of impenetrable shade presented by the forest, and yet not enough to show any of the smaller parts into which it appears separated by day. The wood lay straight before the bow of the boat, seeming to swallow up the widening course of the Scheldt as flowing on, reflecting, here and there, the faint lines of light which it caught from the sky, and which served to mark its track, till it was lost in the sombre shadows of the trees. An indefinite feeling of dread passed through the bosom of Alice of Imbercourt as the boat cut its way on towards the dark and gloomy wilderness which the forest seemed to present at that hour of the night. She believed, indeed, that she had no cause for fear; and her own peculiar plans absolutely required that she should banish all timidity of the kind that she now felt. Some inquiry, however, was necessary, in order to guide her further movements; and, as her apprehensions of pursuit had by this time vanished, she addressed a few words to the boatman, to lead him into conversation regarding the part of the country at which they had now arrived.

"Those seem very dark and extensive woods," she said; "do we pass through them?"

"Yes, noble lady," replied the man, and struck on with more vigour than before, as if he considered the time occupied by the three words he spoke as lost to all profitable employment.

"Are they safe to travel at night?" demanded the young lady again.

"No, noble lady," was all the reply she received.

"But do you mean that it is dangerous to pass through them in a boat?" said Alice.

"I cannot tell, madam," replied the man; but still he rowed on, and the page—laughing with the thoughtless glee of youth—whispered that the attempt was vain to make silent Martin give them any information, as he had never been known to speak ten words to an end in his life. By this time they were within the limits of the forest, and nothing surrounded them on every side but the trees dipping down their branches over the water. Alice, however, ventured one more question, to which the answer she received, though as short, was more satisfactory than those the boatman had formerly given.

"How far does the wood extend?" she demanded.

"Three-quarters of a league, noble lady," replied the boatman, and again plied his oar in silence.

Whether Alice's voice, and his reply, had called attention, or whether the stroke of the oars itself could be heard at the banks, cannot be determined; but he had scarcely answered when a slight plash was heard from behind a little projection of the shore, on which an old oak had planted itself, spreading its roots down to the very river. Then came a rushing sound, as of something impelled quickly through the water, succeeded by the regular sound of oars, and, in a moment after, a boat, rowed by two strong men, darted out into the mid-stream, and followed rapidly after that in which Alice sat. Still silent Martin, as the boy called him, rowed stoutly on, without a word; but the superior power of the two men who pursued soon brought them up alongside the boat, and, grappling her tight, they addressed the boatman, in a tone rough but not uncivil.

"So-ho, friend!" they cried; "stop a bit. What news from Ghent? How goes the good city?"

"Well, well, my masters," replied the boatman, still striving to impel his skiff forward, though the proximity of the other boat rendered the effort to use his oars unavailing.

"It is silent Martin," said one of the men, "and a fair dame, by the Lord. Who have you here, Master Martin?"

"There, there!" replied the boatman, with what appeared to be an immense effort to make an oration;

"there, there! let me get on. You do not stop women, my masters! Surely you would never stop a lady like that!" And, exhausted with this long speech, he again tried to push away from the other boat, but in vain.

"No, no," cried one of the men, "we will not stop the lady long; but every one who rows along the Scheldt, now-a-days, must have a pass from the captain. So come along, Master Martin; and when you and the young lady have given all the news of Ghent that, doubtless, you can give,—for certainly young ladies do not come up the Scheldt at this hour of the night for nothing,—we will let you go on your way."

"Fine times!" said silent Martin: but as resistance was in vain, he suffered them to pilot his boat to the mouth of the little creek from which their own had shot out; and he himself, with a certain degree of awkward gentleness aided Alice of Imbercourt to land.

Her feelings were of a very mixed nature; but assuredly not such as might be imagined from a consideration of the more obvious circumstances of her situation. She was certainly terrified as well as agitated, and she trembled a good deal; but, at the same time, she showed no unwillingness to obey the commands of those who now had her in their power. Her terror, however, did not escape the eyes of the men who had rowed the other boat; and one of them addressed her in a kindly tone, saying, "Fear not, lady, fear not. No lady ever suffered harm or dishonour from the green riders of Hannut. So fear not, and you shall soon be free to go whithersoever you will."

These words, which he spoke as they were landing, seemed to reassure the fair traveller, more than they would, probably, have done most other people at such a moment.

"Oh, where is he?" she exclaimed eagerly. "Lead me to him, I beseech you. It is he whom I am now seeking."

"Ay, indeed!" said the adventurer. "Mean you the Vert Gallant of Hannut, lady? He is soon found by those who seek him, and rather often found by those who seek him not. Ho, Roger!" he continued, addressing his companion in the boat; "rouse up Frank Von Halle, and Simpkin yonder, to keep watch with thee, while I lead the lady and the boy to the rendezvous. Come now, my pretty mistress," he added, "take care

of your steps, for it is as dark as the tomb. Here, take an old man's arm. It was more pliant in days of yore, but never stronger, and will serve at least to help you up the bank."

Alice was glad of assistance, and laid her hand on his arm; but though his occupation had been sufficiently evident before, yet she almost started back when her fingers rested upon plates of cold iron, forming the brassards or defensive armour for the arms,—so much are our minds the slaves of our corporeal sensations, that our convictions are never vivid till we have verified them by our external senses. She recovered herself immediately, however, and held by his arm both for support and direction; for the whole scene around was wrapped in profound obscurity; and though her eye was already accustomed to the night, yet the additional gloom of the forest was so great, that she followed the adventurer in perfect blindness, without being able to see one moment where she was to set her foot the next.

After climbing a slight acclivity, which compelled them to walk slowly, they came to more open ground, where her guide hurried his pace, and Alice was obliged to follow rapidly upon his steps, though not without often shrinking back for fear of striking against the trees, which her imagination pictured as protruding across the path. The way, though in fact short, of course seemed to her long, from the darkness and uncertainty in which she moved: but at length a light began to glisten through the trees; and, after walking on a few minutes longer, she perceived a glare so strong as almost to make her believe that a part of the wood was on fire. As her conductor advanced, she every now and then caught a glimpse, through the breaks in the wood, of figures moving about across the light towards which they were approaching; but a moment after, the whole scene was again shut out, by a tract of withered beech-trees, loaded with their thick dry leaves, through which the path that Alice and her guide were pursuing took a sudden turn. The glare of the fire, however, was sufficiently general to light them easily on their way; and in a few minutes more they emerged at once into the little sheltered arena whence it was diffused.

The frost, as I have before said, had for some time broken up, and the preceding day had been warm and

fine. Nevertheless, sufficient precautions had been taken by the tenants of the forest to dispel, in their own neighbourhood at least, whatever touch remained of winter. In the midst of the open space which Alice now entered, they had piled up,—with very unceremonious appropriation of the duke's forest trees,—a fire of immense logs, sufficient to roast a hecatomb; and many a relic of the more ancient and simple methods of dressing meat displayed themselves around, in various immense pieces of venison and beef roasting on wooden spits in the open air, while a gigantic black caldron, pendent from the immemorial triple chevron, which has suspended all primeval pots from the days of Noah, fumed and bubbled with most savoury promise. Around, in groups, lay a number of stout soldiery, prepared to refresh their vigorous and sinewy limbs with the contents of the pot, or the burden of the spit, as soon as those skilled in the mystery of cooking pronounced that they were ready for the knife. Several more, whose appetite seemed still fiercer, stood round the fire, watching with anticipating expectation the progress of the cookery. But it is to be remarked, at the same time, that among all this number of persons—amounting fully to fifty or sixty—a great deal of decent order was kept up, and nothing like either rioting or confusion was observed, notwithstanding the more than doubtful character of the persons concerned. There was no singing, no shouting; and those that were conversing together spoke in an under tone, as if afraid of disturbing some person engaged in more important business in their near neighbourhood.

The cause of this orderly tranquillity, perhaps, might be seen by running the eye on a little way beyond the fire, where stood a sort of rude, but extensive, wooden shed or hut, raised upon a number of upright piles driven into the ground, and thatched on the top with boughs, and leaves, and rushes, which materials also served to cover three sides of the building. The side that remained open was turned towards the fire, and, consequently, both commanded a view of every thing that took place in that direction, and exposed to the sight of the other parties in the savanna all that was passing in the interior of the hut. It was owing to this disposition that, as Alice approached, she at once perceived the Vert Gallant of Hannut habited, as we have before

described him, reclining on the ground under the shed, with a paper before him, on which was apparently traced a rude map of some country, the topography of which he seemed studying intently. Sitting beside him,—supplied with a flat board, which served the purposes of a table, and on which appeared the implements for writing,—was the figure of the sleek, round monk, of whom we have previously given some account under the name of Father Barnabas, and who now, with a ready pen, seemed tracing some despatch at the dictation of the adventurous leader.

On the other side of the Vert Gallant stood a page,—whose rich dress of green and gold seemed but ill to correspond with the scene in which he was found,—holding a torch high in his hand, to throw light upon the papers before his two companions; and near him again was a person in the habit of a courier of some distinction, whose horse, all in flakes of foam with hard riding, stood held by another page close by the entrance of the shed.

The approach of Alice and her conductor instantly drew the eyes of a great part of the persons assembled in the savanna upon her; and, shrinking from the gaze of the rude men among whom she now found herself, she drew her mantle closer round her, and bent her look upon the ground, while, at the desire of him who had led her thither, she paused with the page, and suffered their guide to advance alone. Without taking any notice of the groups around, he walked forward at once to the shed; and only staying till the Vert Gallant had concluded the sentence which hung upon his lips, he addressed a few words to him, which were inaudible where Alice stood. Their effect upon the leader was great and instantaneous. He started at once upon his feet, and turned fully towards the spot where the young lady stood; but the bars of the casque, which he seemed never to lay aside, still prevented his own countenance from being seen.

After the glance of a single instant, however, he advanced at once to Alice; and, bending respectfully over her hand, which he took in his, he bade her welcome with kind but respectful courtesy.

"I know the general meaning of your coming, lady," he said, "though not the immediate cause; and I will speak with you as soon as I have despatched yon messenger. In the mean time trust to this old man, my

lieutenant, who will lead you to a place where I can hear your commands in private."

Alice listened attentively, and looked up when he had done, with a glance, in which anxiety and apprehension for her father's fate were strangely mingled—considering the moment and the scene—with a rise of the eyebrow, and a turn of the fair mouth, which altogether approached very near one of the merry smiles that had so thronged her lips in happier days. She replied not, however, though at first she appeared about to do so; but following her former conductor in silence, was led once more into the paths of the wood. She was not now called upon to walk far, for little more than a hundred steps brought her in front of a low-roofed building, which in former times had been apparently the abode of one of the forest guards, but which had evidently fallen into the occupation of the free companions.

Every thing within bore an air of comfort and neatness hardly to have been expected from its present tenants; and in the chamber to which Alice was conducted nothing appeared to announce that it was not still the abode of quiet and affluent industry.

The moment she and the page had entered, the old man retired and closed the door; and Alice remained gazing upon the embers of the wood-fire that lay sparkling on the hearth, till the sound of rapid steps passing the window again made her heart beat with redoubled quickness. In a moment after the door was thrown open, and the tall, graceful figure of the Vert Gallant once more stood before her.

"Quit the room, sir page," he said as he entered; "but do not leave the chamber-door."

The boy hesitated, but a sign from Alice made him instantly obey; and the Vert Gallant, advancing, took her hand and led her to a seat.

"You are tired, lady, and evidently agitated," he said; "and I fear much that some event of a sad and serious nature has gained me the honour of your presence in this wild place."

Alice looked up with the same sparkling smile which had before played for a moment on her countenance, "You cannot deceive me!" she said. "Hugh de Mortmar, do you think that I do not know you?"

The Vert Gallant paused an instant, as if in suspense, then threw his arms round the fair girl who stood

beside him, and pressed her gently to his bosom. "Dear Alice," he said, "how did you discover me?"

"It were vain to say how, Hugh," replied Alice: "I may have had suspicions long before; but from the day of the thunder-storm in the forest of Hannut I have not had a doubt; though why Hugh de Mortmar should need to league with outlaws and adventurers, and, as it would appear, to hide his face even from such strange companions, is more difficult to divine."

"I am, indeed, willing, though not obliged, to hide my face even from the bulk of my gallant followers," replied the young cavalier, undoing the clasps of his casque. "Ay! and to guard against surprise or inadvertency, to wear so foul a seeming as this, even beneath that heavy helmet;" and removing the iron cap, he showed her a half-mask representing the countenance of a negro, which covered his own face to the beard.

"You start, Alice!" he continued, "and look somewhat aghast! Is it at that fearful painted piece of emptiness?"

"No!" she answered, "no! But it is to think that you—you, De Mortmar—should, for any cause, condescend to hide yourself beneath such a semblance."

"Indeed, Alice!" said De Mortmar with a smile. "Then tell me, beloved, and put it fairly to your own heart, what it is that a man will not do—what that he should not do—to recover those things that have been snatched from his race by the unjust hand of power, and to free a father from captivity?"

"Nothing, indeed!" replied Alice, to whose bosom one part, at least, of the question went directly home. "Nothing, indeed! and I will believe, with the faith of a martyr, that no other way existed for you to accomplish such an object; although till this time I knew not that you had either parent in existence."

"But your father did," replied the young cavalier; "and when first I called these troops together, Alice,—for you must not confound them with a band of lawless plunderers,—when first I called them together, it seemed the only way by which I could ever hope to liberate my imprisoned father. I am Hugh of Gueldres; and it has been only the hope and the promise of your hand, joined to the prospect held out by your noble father of obtaining my own parent's liberation by peaceful means, which has so long prevented me from asserting his right in

arms, though the whole force of Burgundy were prepared to check me—I might say, indeed, to crush me," he added; "for though, with the forces of Hannut, and all the discontented which the late duke made in his own dominions,—with the aid of France, and, perhaps, of Austria,—my right and my good cause might have done much while Charles remained embroiled in foreign wars, I could have hoped for little had he once turned his whole force against me. But, as I have said, your father persuaded me to delay. For the years that I have thus been induced to pause, I have been obliged to conceal the force of free companions I have raised as best I might; and no method of concealment could be more efficacious than that which I have adopted. As the green riders of Hannut we passed nearly unmolested, while the Duke of Burgundy pursued his ambitious schemes against Lorrain, and his mad ones against the Swiss; and though, if you recall the past events, you will find that the green riders have punished the guilty and the bloodthirsty, have laid many a plundering noble under contribution, and have levelled more than one stronghold of cruelty and oppression with the ground, yet not one act of baseness or barbarity can be traced to themselves."

"Then why such necessity for concealing yourself from them?" demanded Alice, carried away for a moment from other thoughts by the personal interest she felt in her lover's conduct.

"What!" exclaimed the young cavalier, "would you, dear Alice, have had me give so important a secret as that of my existence,—when the Duke of Burgundy and all his court, nay, my own father also, thought me dead —would you have had me give such a secret as that to the keeping of more than five hundred men? No! they were levied secretly by one who has been devoted and faithful to me through life,—good Matthew Gournay, who led you hither. The long accumulated wealth of my more than father, the Lord of Hannut, served to gather them together. His forests and the catacombs under the castle gave them shelter: and, though far too strong in number to fear the weak bands of the prévôt, or the force of any of the neighbouring nobles, it was absolutely necessary to conceal, with the most scrupulous care, from the court of Burgundy, that so large a body of independent troops existed, and still more that

such a force was commanded by one who had cause for deadly hatred towards the duke, now dead. Thus, by the advice and with the aid of the good Lord of Hannut, I mingled with the world as his nephew, under which title he had brought me up from my youth. But as it was necessary to keep my free companions in continual employment, and to acquire over them that personal authority which nothing but the habit of commanding them could obtain, I was often obliged to assume the character of the Vert Gallant of Hannut, and lead them to enterprises, which, however dangerous, I took care should never be dishonourable. The very concealment of my person, which was revealed only to those who had previously known me, added a sort of mysterious influence to the power which general success gave me over them; and I believe that, at this moment, there is no enterprise, however wild or rash, to which they would not follow me, with the most perfect confidence."

"But my father," said Alice, reverting to the still more interesting topic of her parent's danger; "I must speak with you of my father."

"Well, then, in regard to your father," replied the young noble; and proceeding eagerly in his exculpation, he explained to Alice that Imbercourt had always lamented the Duke of Burgundy's severity to his parent, and had striven by every means to call the sovereign to a sense of justice, even before he acquired a personal interest in the house of Gueldres. The real name and rank of the supposed Hugh de Mortmar, the cavalier proceeded, had been revealed to her father, when Alice's hand had first been promised to him as the young heir of Hannut; and seeing at once that the design of liberating the imprisoned Duke of Gueldres, and recovering his duchy, was any thing but hopeless, Imbercourt had only become the more anxious to obviate the necessity of such an attempt, by inducing Charles the Bold to grant as a concession what he might otherwise be forced to yield by compulsion. The purposes of the Duke of Burgundy, however, were not easily changed, nor was his mind to be wrought upon in a day; and Imbercourt was still busy in the difficult task he had undertaken, when the defeat of Nancy took place. On the other hand, he had ever laboured zealously to induce the young heir of Gueldres to delay; and many of those trifling circumstances which impede

the execution of the best laid schemes had combined, from time to time, to second his endeavours with Hugh of Gueldres. Friends and confederates had proved remiss or incapable—supplies had been retarded—changes had taken place in the disposition or circumstances of particular states; and three times the young noble had been half-persuaded, half-compelled, to put off the attempt on which he had determined. All this Hugh of Gueldres poured forth eagerly to Alice of Imbercourt, too anxious to exculpate himself from all blame in the eyes of her he loved, to read in her looks the more serious cares that were busy at her heart.

"In the disturbed and dangerous state of the country," added the young cavalier, "although my father has been liberated by other means, it is my determination to keep my band together; and, watching every turn, to choose that moment which must come, when a small force, acting vigorously for one great purpose, may give the preponderance to right, and crush the wrong for ever."

"Now, then, is the moment, Hugh de Mortmar," cried Alice, clasping her hands eagerly; "now, then, is the moment; if you feel any gratitude towards my father—if you feel any love for me—if you would uphold the right—if you would crush the wrong—if you would save the innocent from ignominious death—lose not an instant, but force the rebel people of Ghent to free my unhappy father."

The young cavalier, who had never suspected the danger of the Lord of Imbercourt, now started with surprise; and Alice, with the eager eloquence of apprehension, made him rapidly acquainted with the events which had occurred in Ghent during the morning, and which had thus brought her to seek him.

"Ha!" cried the Vert Gallant, "does Albert Maurice—does the president of the states sanction such proceedings? I had heard that when the unhappy eschevins were murdered by the populace, he took signal vengeance on the perpetrators of the crime; and if ever I saw a man to whom I should attribute noble feelings, and just and upright sentiments, it would be to him."

"He is ambitious, Hugh," replied Alice, vehemently; "wildly, madly ambitious. I have marked him well throughout—and you may trust a woman's eyes for such discoveries—he has dared to raise his thoughts to

Mary of Burgundy. He loves her—deeply and truly, I believe; but he loves her not with the love which an inferior may feel for a superior whom they may never hope to gain, but rather with that rash and daring love which will make ambition but a stepping-stone to accomplish its bold purpose—which will see the land plunged deeper and deeper in bloodshed, in the wild hope, that out of the ruins of ancient institutions, and the wreck of order, prosperity, and peace, he may build up for himself a seat as high or higher than the ducal chair of Burgundy. It is evident, Hugh; it is evident that he has the power as well as the daring to do much, and one of his first steps will be upon my father's head —for had my father's will and counsel been followed, our fair and gentle princess would now have been the bride of the Dauphin of France, and every hour that he lives will be an hour of suspense and anxiety to that ambitious burgher.

A slight smile of contempt curled the lip of Hugh of Gueldres, as Alice first spoke of the love of the young citizen for the Princess of Burgundy; but it vanished speedily as she went on; and he shook his head with an air of thoughtful sternness as he replied, "He is one to be feared and to be opposed, far more than to be contemned.—Alice, my beloved," he added, taking both her hands in his, "I must think what may be best done to save your father; and of this be assured, that I will lose not one moment in the attempt; but will peril life and fortune, and every future hope, to deliver him instantly."

"And yet," said Alice, while a deep blush spread over her whole face, "for my sake be not over-rash of your own person. Save my father, I beseech, I entreat! but oh, remember that you too,—that you—"

Her feelings overpowered her, and she finished the sentence by tears. Hugh of Gueldres pressed her to his bosom, and consoled her as far as the circumstances permitted. But on such occasions there is little to be said but commonplace; and all he could assure her was, that while he made every effort to save her father, her love would make him as careful of himself as the nature of the task would allow.

In that day, however, every sport and pastime and occupation of man's life was of so rude and dangerous a nature, that perils lost half their fearfulness from

familiarity; and though Alice of Imbercourt could not but feel pained and apprehensive for her lover, yet her feelings of terror were much sooner tranquillized than those of a person in the present day could have been under similar circumstances.

In the mean while, the emergency of the case required that Hugh of Gueldres should instantly fix upon some plan for the deliverance of the Lord of Imbercourt, and proceed to put it in execution without loss of time; and it was also necessary that Alice, whose return to Ghent would have been both fruitless and dangerous, should seek some safe asylum till her father's fate was decided. It was accordingly determined that she should instantly proceed to the castle of Hannut; and means for rendering her journey both safe and easy were arranged at once by her lover.

While the litter for conveying her thither was in preparation, and the soldiers destined to escort her were saddling their horses, Hugh of Gueldres stole a few brief minutes from more painful thoughts, for the enjoyment of her society, and the interchange of happy promises and hopes; nor were those brief moments less sweet to Alice and her lover because they were so few, nor because they were mingled with many an apprehension, nor because many an anxious topic intruded on the conversation. It is the light and shade, the close opposition of the dark and the sparkling, that gives zest even to joy. Hugh de Mortmar enjoyed it to the full for the time; but the moment after he had placed Alice in the vehicle, given strict directions to the band which accompanied her, and had seen the cavalcade wind away into the dark paths of the wood, he gave himself up to less pleasing thoughts, summoned some of those from his troops in whom he felt the greatest degree of confidence, and remained with them for a short time in close deliberation, concerning the measures to be taken for the relief of the Lord of Imbercourt.

A plan was soon determined; and an hour before daylight one of the band was despatched to Ghent, habited as a peasant, and charged to gain every information in regard to the proceedings of the council, but to hasten back with all speed, as soon as he had obtained sufficient knowledge of what was passing in the city. In the meanwhile all was held in readiness, to act immediately upon the receipt of the tidings which he was to

bring; and messengers were despatched in every direction, to prepare the bodies of free companions, scattered through the different woods in the neighbourhood of Ghent, for instant movement upon the city.

CHAPTER VIII.

While such events had been passing without the gates of Ghent, the estates of Flanders and Brabant—as the members somewhat grandiloquently styled the anomalous assemblage which had been collected in that city—had prolonged their sittings till night had shaken hands with morning. The Lords of Hugonet and Imbercourt had, as we have seen, been arrested by their commands; but this was not all, and every individual of any weight, who was clearly connected with what was called the French party at the court, had likewise been committed to prison. It may be necessary, however, to state how such a bold and sweeping measure,—a measure so full of difficulties, and so likely to encounter strenuous opposition,—had been carried into effect.

No favour was shown to any one; and, as soon as the assembly met, Albert Maurice, so averse, in general, to deeds of violence, proposed in quick succession, and with an eager light in his eye, which proved how deeply his personal feelings were implicated, the names of the victims who were to be exposed to the fiery ordeal of a public trial, under such an excited and furious state of the popular mind. With bold and sweeping positions, supported by extraordinary eloquence, he laid it down, in his opening address, as a first grand principle, that those who sought to unite Flanders with France were declared enemies to their native country; and he went on to assume, that even those who could show that no mercenary motive influenced them were worthy, at least, of banishment; while those who could be proved to have been bought by France merited nothing less than death. All this was readily admitted by his hearers; but the high rank and station of the first men that he then proceeded to proscribe, their fair reputation, and a long train of brilliant services to the

state, caused no small feeling of surprise and apprehension to agitate the various members of the states, as they heard them named. But there was a power and an authority in the tone of the young president which overawed or carried away the greater part of his hearers; and the calm sneer or cold philosophic reasoning of Ganay, who supported him, drove or induced many of the rest to yield.

Still it required but the strenuous opposition of some one individual, to rouse and lead a large party in the states against the bold and dangerous measures proposed; and to the surprise of all, that individual was worthy Martin Fruse, who rose, and, after some agitated embarrassment,—occasioned both by the importance of the subject on which he was about to speak, and his dislike to oppose his nephew,—found words to begin: and, once having done so, poured forth, with rapid utterance, one of those torrents of rude eloquence which generosity of heart and rectitude of feeling will sometimes elicit from the roughest and most untutored mind.

"No, no, Albert! No, no, my dear boy!" he exclaimed. "No, no, it is very wrong,—very wrong indeed! For God's sake, my friends and fellow-citizens, pause! let us be wise and firm, but moderate and just. We have done great things,—indeed we have. We have recovered our freedom; we have regained those ancient laws and usages which were our blessing in the olden time, and which may bless us still, if we use them discreetly. But, fellow-citizens, remember, oh, remember! there is a point where our own privileges end, and where those of other classes and other men begin. Let us not take one stride beyond the barriers of our own rights; for surely, if we do, we shall, sooner or later, be driven back with disgrace. The man who, with power to right himself, suffers another to rob him of his property, is little better than a fool; but he who, because he has once been robbed, grasps at the possessions of another, is none the less a robber himself. The nobles have their own privileges and their own laws; and right it is that they should have them, for perhaps we are less fitted, from our habits and situation, to judge them, than they are to judge us. But, setting that point aside, we claim our own laws and our own judges, and we have obtained them: the nobles,

too, claim theirs, and let them have them too. If they have wronged each other, let them right themselves; and if they have wronged the state, whereby we may suffer too, let us carry up our impeachment of their conduct to the footstool of the princess, and demand that they be judged by their peers, according to law. But on no account let us either arrest them without lawful authority; and still less let us presume,—a body of men superior to them in numbers, and in some sort, I will say, prejudiced against them, because we hold a lower rank than they do,—and still less, I say, let us presume to judge them, when we cannot, from our very station, judge them impartially. A man can very well judge others, maybe, when he despises them; but no men can judge others that they envy. I know nothing of these two lords; and all I have heard of them makes me believe that they were good and faithful servants of their prince, so long as he was living; but if you have good cause to think that they have since betrayed their country to France, accuse them before the princess and her council, and let them be judged by their equals."

"What! and give them time to escape the pursuit of justice!" demanded Albert Maurice, sternly; but immediately assuming a softer tone, he added, "Had any other man spoken the words we have just heard, I should have instantly called upon the States of Flanders not to entertain for a moment ideas which would go to circumscribe all their powers. I would have endeavoured to show that we have a right, as the representatives of the whole of Flanders and Brabant, to defend our existence as a nation, and our general interests as a free people, by arresting any one whom we find labouring to sell us at the highest price to a foreign power; and, by making the most terrible example of such traitors, to deter others from similar treason,—without adducing any weaker reasons. But to you, my uncle,—my best and kindest friend,—I am bound by love and gratitude; and—as the oldest and most revered member of the council—to you the states are bound by reverence and esteem to yield every motive which can satisfy your mind. I, therefore, as one of the provincial council of the princess, may now inform you that one-half of that council—"

"The Duke of Gueldres has signed the order," whispered Ganay, laying a parchment before the president,

who instantly proceeded,—"that even a majority of the council have consented to the arrest of these two men, the Lord of Imbercourt and the Chancellor Hugonet and surely, did there exist no other right in this assembly to try them for their manifold and recent offences, the warrant of three such men of their own order as the Duke of Cleves, the Duke of Gueldres,* and the Bishop of Liege would be ample authority for such a proceeding."

As he spoke, he spread out the parchment on the table before the rest, and slowly pronouncing the names of the three princes who, from the base motives of personal ambition or revenge, had been induced to consent to such a degradation of their class, he pointed with his finger in succession to their signatures attached to the order for arresting the unfortunate nobles. Martin Fruse was silent; the voice of every other person present was raised for the instant execution of a warrant so signed, though many, by leaving the order without any further authority, would have gladly shifted the responsibility of the act upon those princes who had signed it, and would thus have escaped themselves from a task for which, with all the will in the world, they wanted the necessary courage.

Albert Maurice, however, and several others, made of sterner stuff than the generality of the burghers by whom they were surrounded, had more extended views and more daring purposes, and were determined not to trust the execution of the vengeance they proposed to wreak to such doubtful friends as the Dukes of Cleves and Gueldres, and the Bishop of Liege. The first, indeed, had shown himself the bitter foe of Imbercourt from the moment he had discovered that the statesman had determined to save the country, if possible, from foreign invasion, by uniting Mary of Burgundy to the heir of the French crown. To the Bishop of Liege Imbercourt had long been a personal enemy; and the Duke of Gueldres had motives of his own, or rather motives suggested by Ganay, for seeking to alienate the unhappy minister from the councils of the princess.

* The Dukes of Cleves and Gueldres were actuated, in the present instance, by very evident motives; the one wishing to obtain the hand of the princess —which Imbercourt and Hugonet strove to give to France—for his nearest relation, and the other for himself. The motive of the Bishop of Liege is supposed by historians to have been revenge for acts of justice rendered by Imbercourt under the reign of Charles the Bold.

Each, however, of these great lords, Albert Maurice well knew, was willing to compound for the exile of the minister, and to spare his life; but he himself judged rightly, when he thought that Imbercourt, in power or in banishment, would never cease his efforts to execute the design he had laid out, till he were dead, or the scheme accomplished; and Albert Maurice resolved that he should die. He tried hard to convince his own heart that his intentions were purely patriotic; but his own heart remained unsatisfied. Yet, having once yielded to the promptings of the worse spirit, the burning doubt in his own bosom, in regard to the purity of his motives, but urged him on the course he had chosen with more blind and furious impetuosity, in order to escape from the torturing self-examination to which conscience prompted him continually. He saw around him difficulties and dangers on every side,—obstacles alike opposed to his ambition, to his love, and to his aspirations after liberty. He believed himself to be in the situation of a mariner on a narrow bank, over which the ocean threatened every instant to break, and overwhelm himself and the vessel of the state; and he resolved at once to push off into the midst of the stormy waves, in despite of the fears of his companions, believing that his own powers could steer the ship safely and that their feebleness must yield him the command, till he had piloted her into the port for which he had already determined to sail.

The timidity of some, the subtlety of others, the wilfulness, the self-conceit of all, he saw could only be bent to his purposes by plunging them into an ocean of difficulties, from which he alone could extricate them; and, understanding well the characters of those by whom he was surrounded, and prepared to make their talents, their influence, their wealth, their vices, their very weaknesses, subservient to his one great purpose, he resolved to involve them all in schemes of which he alone knew the extent.

At once, therefore, he rejected the idea that the warrant, signed by the three princes he had named, was sufficient; and though he allowed their names to stand first, he urged upon those who heard him, that the states must also join in the same act, or forfeit thenceforward all pretence to real power. His arguments and his authority easily brought over a large majority of the

hearers; and the warrants were sent forth bearing the names of the whole assembly. A number of other persons, less obnoxious, were then, as I have before said, added to the list of those to be secured; and the meeting of the states did not break up till the fearful work of proscription had been dreadfully extended.

The assembly then rose; and member by member, bowing low to the president,—who had the day before taken possession of a suite of apartments in the Stadthuys, and now made it his dwelling,—left the town-hall, and departed. Ganay alone remained, and he did so on a sign to that effect from Albert Maurice; who, when all the rest were gone, and the doors closed, leaned his folded arms upon the table, and buried his brows upon them, as if utterly exhausted with all the fatigues of the day, and the struggle of many a potent passion in the arena of his own bosom. The dull flames of the long-burnt lamps but dimly illumined the wide vacant hall, and its dark wainscot; but the great cresset hung just above the head of Albert Maurice, and as the light fell upon the bright curls of dark hair dropping over his arms, and upon the magnificent head and form which those curls adorned, it seemed shining upon some fallen spirit, in the first lassitude of its despair. Nor did the withered form of Ganay, with his shrewd keen eyes fixed upon the young citizen, and his cheek shrunk and pale with the long workings of passion,—concealed by subtlety, but not the less potent on that account,—offer a bad image of some dark tempter, enjoying his triumph over the fall of a better being, then writhing before his eyes under the very fruition of its first evil hopes.

It was Ganay who began the discourse, and the tone of his voice at once roused Albert Maurice from his momentary absence of mind. "They have all plunged in now, indeed!" said the druggist. "I thought not they would run before our will so easily."

"They have plunged in, indeed," replied Albert Maurice; "and so have we! But that matters not. We will lead them safely through. But now tell me—How was the Duke of Gueldres won to our wishes? He owes his freedom as much to Imbercourt as to any one. Is he, then, so base a slave as he has been pictured? Is the soil of his heart really so fertile in weeds that good service produces nothing thence but ingratitude?"

"Nay, nay, my young friend," answered the druggist,

while a bitter sneer lurked round his lip at the very candour he assumed; "you are beginning to think sadly ill of mankind. They are not so bad a race as you believe. Like all great patriots, you affect to despise the very world you would shed your blood to serve. No, no; the Duke of Gueldres, good honest man, would be as grateful as his neighbours, if no more powerful motive came in the way of gratitude. You forget, Albert Maurice, that we are teaching him to believe that his pretensions to the heiress of Burgundy are full as good as those of the sottish heir of Cleves; so that, whoever seeks to give her hand to a stranger is an enemy to Adolphus of Gueldres, who counts boldly on being her husband."

The cheek of Albert Maurice flushed, and then grew pale; for often in the dull and filthy trade of worldly policy we must work with tools we are ashamed to touch, and employ means abhorrent to man's better nature. Thus, though obliged to balance one mean soul against another, as suitors for her he himself loved, it stung the young aspirant to the very heart to hear their pretensions calmly named by any other human being; and, giving way to the first burst of indignation, he exclaimed, "Out on him, vile swine! But beware, sir druggist; beware how you raise his mad dreams too high! and still more beware," he continued, as a sudden suspicion seemed to cross his mind, awakened, as had been frequently the case before, by the sneering tone in which the druggist sometimes spoke: "and still more beware how you dare to play into his hands. Mark me, sir," and grasping Ganay by the arm, he bent his dark brow upon him—"mark me! I know you well; and you know me, but not so well! You think you use me as a tool, because, to a certain point, you have succeeded while following my steps, and have obtained, and are obtaining, the vengeance for which you thirst. But learn and know that you have succeeded so far only because the interests of the state and your own desires have been bound up together. It is that those whom you seek to destroy have given you the means of destroying them by rendering it necessary that I should strike them; not, as perhaps you dream, that you have bent me to your purpose. You see I know you, and some of your most secret thoughts. But hear me further ere you reply. Learn, too, that the transactions of thirty years ago are not so deeply buried beneath the

21583

dust of time as you may think; and that though you and Adolphus of Gueldres may meet as strangers now-a-day, I have dreamed that there was a time when ye knew more of each other. So now, you see, I know you, and some of your most secret deeds; and once more, I say, beware!"

It was the second time that Albert Maurice had referred boldly to events in the past, which Ganay had supposed forgotten; and the ashy cheek of the druggist grew, if any thing, a shade paler than before, while, for a moment, he gazed upon the face of Albert Maurice with a glance of amazement, most unwonted to his guarded features. It passed off, however, in an instant, and a flash of something like anger succeeded in its room. But that, too, passed away, and he replied calmly, but somewhat bitterly, "I will beware. But you, too, Albert Maurice, beware also. There are some things that it is not well to discuss; but if you can trace—as for aught I know or care perhaps you can—my whole course of being for more than thirty years, you well know that I am one whose vengeance is somewhat deadly; and that however strong you may feel yourself, it were better to incur the hatred of a whole host of monarchs than that of so humble a thing as I am. Curl not your proud lip, sir president, but listen to me, and let us both act wisely. I love you, and have loved you from your childhood; and, in the great changes that are taking place around us, we have advanced together—I, indeed, a step behind you; or, in other words, you have gone on in search of high things and mighty destinies, while I have had my objects, no less dear and precious to my heart, though perhaps less pompously named in the world's vocabulary. Let us not, now that we have done so much, and stood so long side by side, turn face to face as foes. Doubtless you fear not me: but let me tell you, Albert Maurice, that I am as fearless as yourself,—nay, something more so,—for there are many mere words cunningly devised, and artfully preached upon, by monks, and priests, and knaves, and tyrants, which you fear, and I do not. But let us set all these things aside; it is wisest and best for us both to labour on together, without suspicions of each other. If, as you say, you know the secrets of the past, you well know that I have no mighty cause to love Adolphus of Gueldres. In what I have done to win him

popularity, and to make him raise his eyes to the hand of the sweet and beautiful Princess of Burgundy, I have but followed your own directions, and no more; and you must feel and know that his power over the people, and his hope of that bright lady, are, when compared with yours, but as a feather weighed against a golden crown."

The firmest heart that ever beat within man's bosom is, after all, but a strange weak thing; and,—though feelings very little short of contempt and hatred were felt by the young citizen for his insidious companion,—though he knew that he was false and subtle, and believed that even truth in his mouth was virtually a lie, from being intended to deceive,—yet, strange to say, the goodly terms that he bestowed upon Mary of Burgundy, and the flattering picture he drew of his hearer's probable success, soothed, pleased, and softened Albert Maurice, and wiped away, for the moment, many of the individual suspicions he had been inclined to entertain before. It must not be supposed, however, that those suspicions, thus obliterated, did not soon return. They were like the scratches on an agate, which a wet sponge will apparently wipe away for ever, but which come back the moment the stone is dry again, and cloud it altogether. He knew Ganay too well, he saw too deeply into the secrets of his subtle heart, to be ever long without suspicion of his purposes, though artful words and exciting hopes, administered skilfully to his passions, would efface them for a time. If this weakness,—and it certainly was a great one,—did not influence his conduct, it was, perhaps, as much as could be expected from man.

"I mean not, Ganay," he said, "either to taunt you or to pain you; but as our objects are different, which you admit yourself, I do you no wrong,—even on your own principles,—in supposing that as soon as those objects are no longer to be gained by aiding and supporting me, you will turn to some one whose plans may better coincide with your own. My purpose, then, in showing you how thoroughly I know you, is, that you may have the means of seeing that it would be dangerous to abandon my interest for that of any other person; and that you may balance in your own mind the prospects and difficulties on either side. But, as you say, to drop this subject, and never to resume it again, unless the day should come when separate interests and different feelings may oppose us hostilely to each other, tell

me, candidly and fairly, do you think that if we encourage the popularity of him of Gueldres in opposition to the proud Duke of Cleves, we may safely count upon his ultimate failure; for did I believe that there were a possibility of his success, I would slay him myself ere such a profanation should take place:" and as he spoke he fixed his eyes upon the face of the druggist, in order to make the expression of the other's countenance a running commentary upon the words he was about to reply.

"I think," replied the druggist, firmly and emphatically, "that Adolphus of Gueldres—stigmatized by the pure immaculate world we live in as the blood-stained, the faithless, the perjured, the violator of all duties and of all rights—has as much chance of obtaining heaven as of winning Mary of Burgundy. I tell you, Albert Maurice, that she would sooner die,—ay, die a thousand times, were it possible,—than wed the man she has been taught to hate from her infancy."

"I believe she would," murmured the young citizen, calling to mind the demeanour of the princess when giving the order for the liberation of the Duke of Gueldres; "I believe she would, indeed."

"Besides," continued the druggist, "besides, she loves another. Ay, Albert Maurice, start not! She loves another. What, man, are you so blind? I had fancied that all your hopes, and one-half your daring, had birth in that proud consciousness."

Never dreaming that his companion would so boldly dilate upon what was still but one of the most indistinct visions of hope, even within his own bosom,—a vision, indeed, which was the prime motive of all his thoughts and actions, but which he had never dared to scrutinize carefully,—Albert Maurice, with all the irritable jealousy of love, had instantly concluded that Ganay, in the first part of what he said, had alluded to some other object of the princess's affection, and his cheek for a moment turned pale, till the latter part of the other's speech set the blood rushing back into it with renewed force.

"Mark my words," continued Ganay; "mark my words, and see whether, by the gray dawn of to-morrow, you are not sent for to the palace. But remember, Albert Maurice, that though patriotism may lead a man to the summit of ambition; and though love, as well as glory and authority, may become the fitting reward for

services rendered to his country, yet, in the path thither, he must never sacrifice his duty for any of those temptations, or he will surely lose all, and gain nothing."

A slight smile passed over the features of Albert Maurice,—whose passions, in this instance, did not interfere to blind his native acuteness,—as he saw what use his artful companion could make of the words duty and patriotism while it served his purpose, though at other times he might virtually deny the existence of such entities. "How mean you?" he said. "Your position, good friend, is general; but you have some more particular object in it."

"I mean," replied Ganay, "that should Mary of Burgundy use all those sweet words which love itself teaches woman to employ in moving the heart of man, in order to shake your duty to your country, and make you work out the safety of two convicted traitors, you, Albert Maurice, must have firmness enough to say no, even to her you love; remembering that if you let them escape, even into banishment, you may look upon the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with the Dauphin of France as sure as that you yourself exist. Look, too, a little further, and think of the consequences. Even supposing you could brook your personal disappointment, and calmly see her you love in the arms of the weak boy of France, what would befall your country? Already one-half of the nobles of Burgundy and Flanders have gone over to the French! Already half our towns are in possession of Louis, that most Christian knave; and at the very first breathing of the news that a treaty of marriage was signed between the heirs of France and Burgundy, the whole land would rush forward to pass beneath the yoke, while the blood of those who sought to save their country would be poured out in the streets of Ghent, to expiate the crime of patriotism."

"Fear not," replied Albert Maurice; "proved, as it is, beyond all doubt, that these two men have dared to negotiate the sale of their native land to him who has been its great enemy, there is no power on earth that could induce me to interpose and save them from the outstretched arm of justice. They shall be fairly heard, and fairly tried; and if it be proved,—which it cannot be,—that they are guiltless, why let them go, in God's name, as free as the blast of the ocean: but if they be condemned, they die, Ganay."

"So be it," said the druggist; "in this instance at least, justice to your country is your only chance of personal success; and now, good night, and every fair dream attend you."

Thus ended their long conference; and Ganay, descending from the hall, waked his two sleepy attendants, who were nodding over an expiring fire in the vestibule below. Each instantly snatched up his sword and target, to conduct his master home, for the streets of Ghent were not quite so safe since the death of Charles the Bold as they had been under his stricter reign. A boy with a lantern preceded the druggist on his way homeward; and as he walked on across the Lys towards the church of St. Michael, the subtle plotter bent his eyes upon the ground, and seemed counting the stones, as the checkering light of the lantern passed over them. But his thoughts were not so void of matter; and he muttered words which showed how deeply some parts of his late conversation,—which seemed to affect him but little at the time,—had in reality sunk into his heart. "He is quieted for the present," he said, "and he must do out his work,—but he must die, —I fear me he must die; and yet my heart fails me to think it. Why and how did he learn so much? and why was he mad enough to breathe it when he had learned it? But I must think more ere I determine. Those papers!" he added,—"those papers,—if I could but get at those papers! Whatever hearsay knowledge he may have gained, he could make out nothing without those papers."

While thus—muttering to himself broken sentences of the dark purposes which dwelt within his own bosom—the druggist pursued his way homeward, Albert Maurice retired to his bed-chamber in the town-house, and summoned his attendants to aid in undressing him. No man really more despised the pomp and circumstance of state; but since he had taken upon himself the government of Flanders,—for the power he had assumed was little less,—he had in some degree affected a style of regal splendour, and attendants of all kinds waited his commands. The necessity of captivating the vulgar mind by show, and of impressing on the multitude respect for the office that he held, was the excuse of the young citizen to himself and others; but there was something more in it all than that,—a

sort of flattering stimulus to hope and expectation was to be drawn from the magnificence with which he surrounded himself; and he seemed to feel, that the thought of winning Mary of Burgundy was something more than a dream, when he found himself in some sort acting the monarch in her dominions. He felt, too,—and there might be a charm in that also,—that he acted the monarch well; and that the robes he had assumed became him, while the native dignity of his whole demeanour, and the unaffected ease with which he moved amid the splendour he displayed, dazzled the eyes of those that surrounded him, so that he met nothing but deference and respect from all.

He slept that night as calmly in the couch of state as if he had been born among the halls of kings; and he was still in the arms of slumber, when a page waked him, announcing, as Ganay had predicted, that the princess required his presence at the palace with all speed. He instantly rose, and dressing himself in such guise as might become him well, without incurring a charge of ostentatious presumption, he proceeded to obey the summons he had received; and was led at once to the presence of Mary of Burgundy.

The princess, as usual, was not absolutely alone; for one of her attendants,—the same who had accompanied her during the thunder-storm in the forest of Hannut,—now remained at the farther extremity of the room, but at such a distance as to place her out of ear-shot. It was, indeed, as well that it should be so; for Mary was prepared to plead to her own subject for the life of her faithful servants,—a humiliation to which the fewer witnesses admitted the better. The feeling of degradation to which she submitted was not without a painful effect upon Mary's heart, however gentle and yielding that heart might be; and the struggle between anxiety to save the ancient friends of her father and herself, and the fear of descending from her state too far, wrote itself in varying characters upon her countenance, which weeks of painful thoughts and fears had accustomed too well to the expression of agitated apprehension.

It was still, however, as beautiful a picture of a bright and gentle soul as ever mortal eye rested on; and as Albert gazed upon it, half-shrouded as it was by the long black mourning veil which the princess wore

in memory of her father's death, he could not but feel that there was a power in loveliness like that, to shake the sternest resolves of his heart, and turn him all into weakness. The agitation of his own feelings too,—the hopes that would mount, the wishes that would not be repressed,—rendered him anxiously alive to every varying expression of Mary's face; and without the vanity of believing that all he saw spoke encouragement to himself, he could not but dream that the colour came and went more rapidly in her cheek, that her eye more often sought the ground while speaking to him, than in the most earnest consultation with her other counsellors. Perhaps, indeed, it was so; but from far other causes than his hopes would have led him to believe. Seldom called to converse with him but in moments of great emergency, Mary was generally more moved at such times than on other occasions, and when agitated, the eloquent blood would ever come and go in her cheek, with every varying emotion of her heart. In him, too, she met one of a class with which she was unaccustomed to hold any near commune: and, at the same time, there was a power, and a freshness, and a graceful enthusiasm in all the young burgher's demeanour, which never can be without effect upon so fine a mind as that of the princess. Perhaps, too—though had she ever dreamed that such a thing as love for her could enter into his imagination, she would have been as cold as ice itself—perhaps, too, she might feel that there was something of admiration in the young burgher's eyes, which she would not encourage, but at which she could not feel offended, and which she might have done something to check, had she not felt afraid of wounding and alienating one whom it was her best interest to attach. Nevertheless, it might be the very desire of doing so, and the fear of giving pain, that agitated her still more, and rendered her manner more changeful and remarkable.

Such were their mutual feelings,—varying through a thousand fine shades, which would require a far more skilful hand than that which now writes to portray,—when they met on that eventful morning—the sovereign to solicit, and the subject to deny.

A few words explained to Albert Maurice the cause of the call he had received to Mary's presence; and the occasion having once been explained, she went on,

with gentle but zealous eloquence, with a flushed cheek and a glistening eye, to beseech him, by every motive that she thought likely to move his heart, to save the lives of her faithful servants.

"Indeed, dear lady," he replied, "you attribute to me more power than I possess; for much I fear, that, even were I most anxious to screen two men, accused of selling their native land to a foreign prince, from a judicial trial and judgment, I should be totally unable to bring such a thing to pass. Willingly, most willingly, would I lay down my own life for your service, madam, and be proud to die in such a cause; but to pervert the course of justice would be a far more bitter task to Albert Maurice than to die himself."

"But remember, sir, oh remember!" replied Mary, "that we are told to show mercy, as we hope for mercy; and still further remember, that, in their dealings with France, the Lords of Imbercourt and Hugonet were authorized by my own hand; and if there were a crime therein committed, I am the criminal alone! The act was mine, not theirs, as under my commands they went."

"Your grace is too generous," replied the young burgher, "to take upon yourself so great a responsibility, when, in truth, it is none of yours. How reluctant you were to treat with France, none knows better than I do; and what unjust means must have been used to induce you, I can full well divine."

"Nay, nay, indeed!" she said: "it was my voluntary act,—done upon due consideration; and no one is to blame, save myself."

"If, lady," rejoined Albert Maurice, speaking in a low but solemn tone, "if you indeed do wish for this French alliance,—if you desire to unite yourself with your father's pertinacious enemies,—if, as your own voluntary act, you would give your hand to the puny boy, whose numbered days will never see him sovereign of France, and who can alone serve to furnish a new claim to Louis XI. for annexing your territories to his own—if, I say, such be your own sincere desire, I will most assuredly state it to the States General."

"If I say that it is so, will it save the lives of my two faithful servants?" demanded Mary, anxiously, while her heart beat painfully with the struggle between the desire of rescuing her counsellors, and her shrink-

ing abhorrence of the marriage proposed to her. "Will it,—tell me,—will it save them?"

"I cannot promise that it will," replied Albert Maurice. "The states must decide, whether those who counselled such an act are not still most guilty, though your grace was prevailed upon to sanction it. Nor, lady, must you think that such a sacrifice on your part would achieve even the pacification of France and Burgundy. Be assured, that there is not an unbought man in all Flanders who would not shed the last drop of his blood ere he would consent to the union of the two countries. Nor do I believe that Louis of France himself would accede. He claims the whole of your lands, madam, upon other titles. Burgundy he calls his own by right of male descent; the districts of the Somme he declares to have been unjustly wrung from the crown of France; and the counties of Flanders and Artois, he says, are his of right, though he has not yet deigned to yield a specification of his claim. Doubtless he has striven to buy your servants and your counsellors; and many of them has he purchased—not to promote your union with his son, but to betray your lands and cities into his power."

"But these faithful friends," said Mary, "these noble gentlemen whom you now hold in captivity, are all unsoiled by such a reproach."

"Your pardon, madam," replied Albert Maurice, gravely; "such is one of the chief crimes with which they are charged. Good evidence, too, it is said, can be produced against them; and though I have not myself examined the proofs, yet I fear they will be found but too strong."

Mary stood aghast—not that she believed the accusation for a moment, but that any one should find means of making even such a pretext against those whose honour seemed to her too bright for such a stain to rest upon them for a moment. "Oh, save them!" she exclaimed, at length, with passionate eagerness. "Save them, sir, if you love honour, if you love justice! Look there," she continued, advancing to the high window of the apartment, and pointing with her hand to the scene spread out below—"Look there!"

Albert Maurice gazed out in some surprise. It was, indeed, as fair a sight as ever he had looked upon. The situation of the casement at which he stood com-

manded an extensive view over the whole country round. The sun had not risen above an hour. The world was in all the freshness of early spring. The mists and dews of night, flying from before the first bright rays of day, had gathered together in thin white clouds, and were skimming rapidly towards the horizon, leaving the sky every moment more blue and clear. Ghent lay yet half-asleep beneath the palace, with its rivers and its canals constantly gleaming in here and there among the gray, sober-coloured houses, while innumerable monasteries, with their green gardens, and churches, with their tall spires, broke the monotony both of colour and form, and pleasantly diversified the scène. As the eye wandered on over the walls, past the suburbs, through a maze of green fields and young plantations, a fair, undulating country met its view, interspersed with deep, brown woods, from which every now and then rose a village spire, or a feudal tower, while the windings of the Scheldt and the Lys, with every now and then an accidental turn of the Lieve, were seen glistening like streams of silver through the distant prospect. Over all the ascending sun was pouring a flood of the soft light of spring, while the clouds, as they flitted across the sky, occasionally cut off his beams from different parts of the view, but gave a more sparkling splendour, by contrast, to the rest.

"Look there!" said Mary of Burgundy—"look there! Is not that a fair scene?" she added, after a moment's pause.—"Is not that a beautiful land? Is it not a proud and pleasant thing to be lord of cities like this, and countries like that before you? Yet let me tell you, sir, I would sacrifice them all. I would resign power and station, the broad lands my father left me, the princely name I own—ay, and never drop a tear to know them lost for ever, so that I could save the life of those two noble gentlemen now in such peril by false suspicions. Oh, sir, I beseech, I entreat; and did it beseem either of us, I would cast myself at your feet to implore that you would save them. You can, —I know you can; for well am I aware of all the power which, not unjustly, your high qualities have obtained among your fellow-citizens. Oh, use it, sir, for the noblest, for the best of purposes!—use it to save them at my entreaty, and for my sake."

As she spoke, agitation, eagerness, and grief over-

came every other consideration, and the tears streamed rapidly over her fair cheeks, while with clasped hands and raised up eyes, she sought to move her hearer. Nor was he unmoved; on the contrary, he was shaken to the very heart. That stern determination which he thought virtue, the ambition which rose up beside patriotism, and was beginning to overtop the nobler shoot—all were yielding to the more powerful force of love; or, if they struggled, struggled but feebly against that which they could not withstand. His temples throbbed, his cheek turned pale, his lip quivered, and words were rising to utterance which might, perhaps, have changed the fate of nations, when quick steps and loud voices in the ante-chamber attracted the attention both of himself and the princess.

"Stand back, sir," exclaimed the coarse tones of the Duke of Gueldres. "By the Lord, if the princess is in counsel with any one, as you say, the more reason that I should be present at it. Am not I one of her counsellors both by birth and blood?"

By this time he had thrown open the door; and, striding boldly into the chamber, he advanced with a "Good morrow, fair cousin: if you be in want of counsellors, here am I, ready to give you my best advice."

Mary's cheek turned pale as he approached; but she replied, mournfully, "My best and most tried counsellors have been taken from me, sir, and I know not in whom I may now trust."

"Trust in me, fair cousin, trust in me," replied the duke; but Albert Maurice interrupted him.

"I believe, sir," he said, "that it is customary for the princess, when she wants the counsel of any individual, to send for him, and for none to intrude themselves upon her without such a summons. I, having been so honoured this morning, and having received her commands, shall now leave her, doubting not that she will be well pleased that we both retire."

"School not me, sir citizen," replied the Duke of Gueldres, fiercely; "for, though you fly so high a flight, by the Lord I may find it necessary some day to trim your wings."

Albert Maurice replied only by a glance of withering contempt, which might have stung the other into some new violence, had not Mary interposed. "I did not think to see such wrangling in my presence, gentlemen,"

she said, assuming at once that air of princely dignity which became her station; "I would be alone. You may retire!" and for a single instant the commanding tone and the flashing eye reminded those who saw her of her father, Charles the Bold.

The rude Duke of Gueldres himself was abashed and overawed; and, having no pretence prepared for remaining longer, he bowed, and strode gloomily towards the door, satisfied with having interrupted the conversation of the princess and Albert Maurice, of which he had from some source received intimation. The young citizen followed, not sorry to be relieved from entreaties which had nearly overcome what he believed to be a virtuous resolution; although—with that mixture of feelings which scarcely any circumstance in human life is without—he was pained and angry, at the same time, to be forced to quit the society of one so beloved, however dangerous that society might be to his fancied duties. He bowed low as he departed; and Mary, dropping the tone of authority she had assumed, with clasped hands, and an imploring look, murmured, in a low tone, "Remember! oh, remember!"

The Duke of Gueldres proceeded down the stairs before him, with a heavy step and a gloomy brow. Nevertheless, that prince, whose cunning and whose violence were always at war with each other, only required a short time for thought, to perceive that he could not yet, in the bold designs which had been instilled into his mind, dispense with the assistance and support of the young citizen; and he determined, as speedily as possible, to do away any unfavourable impression which his rude insolence might have left upon the mind of the other.

"Master Albert Maurice," he said, as soon as they had reached the vestibule below, "i'faith I have to beg your pardon for somewhat sharp speech but now. Good sooth, I am a hasty and a violent man, and you should not cross me."

"My lord duke," replied Albert Maurice gravely, but not angrily, "your apology is more due to yourself than to me. It was the Duke of Gueldres you lowered: Albert Maurice you could not degrade; and as to crossing you, my lord,—that man's violence must be a much more terrible thing than I have ever met with yet, that

could scare me from crossing him when I felt it my duty to do so."

The Duke of Gueldres bit his lip, but made no reply; for there was a commanding spirit about the young burgher, which, supported by the great power he possessed in the state, the other felt he could not cope with, at least till he had advanced many steps further in popular favour. He turned away angrily, however, seeing that conciliation was also vain: and flinging himself on his horse, rode off with the few attendants he had collected in haste to accompany him to the palace.

Albert Maurice returned more slowly to the town-house, clearly perceiving that the coming of the Duke of Gueldres, in the midst of his conference with the princess, had not been accidental, and endeavouring, as he rode on, to fix with certainty upon the person who had given that prince the information on which he had acted.

CHAPTER IX.

A DAY intervened: but at noon on that which followed, an immense dense crowd was assembled in the open space before the town-house of Ghent. Nevertheless, though the multitude was perhaps greater than ever the square of St. Pharaïlde had contained before, there was a stillness about it all, which spoke that men were anticipating some great event. Each one who spoke addressed his neighbour in that low tone which argues awe: but by far the greater part of the people remained perfectly silent, with their eyes turned towards the town-house, immediately in front of which stood a scaffold, hung with black cloth, supporting two low blocks of wood, and surrounded by a large party of the burgher guard. A still larger body of the same troops kept the space between the scaffold and the public building before which it was placed; and, in all, the armed force present seemed more than sufficient to keep order and overawe the evil-disposed. In fact, the regular municipal power had been increased to an extraordinary degree during the last fortnight, both by an extended

levy among the citizens themselves, and by the raising of a number of extraordinary companies from among the peasantry of the neighbouring districts, joined to all such disbanded soldiers as were willing to enrol themselves under the banners of the commune. The trained force thus at the disposal of the town-council of Ghent amounted to at least seven thousand men, and, on the morning of which we speak, a great part of this body were drawn up between the town-house and the scaffold, and in the main court of the building.

At the same time, it is to be remarked, that almost all the burghers, and a number of the peasantry of the country round about, had provided themselves with warlike weapons, since the first disturbances which followed the death of the duke; so that the multitude which thronged the space before the town-house appeared universally in arms. The principal weapons with which they had furnished themselves were long pikes; and any one gazing over the market-place might have fancied it crowded by an immense body of dismounted lancers; but, at the same time, a number of the more wealthy were provided with swords also; and one or two appeared more in the guise of regular men at-arms than simple citizens. It was remarked that amid the assembly were a number of persons with somewhat hard features and weather-beaten countenances, habited in the ordinary dress of peasants, but in general better armed than the rest of the people. These men seemed to have but few acquaintances in the town, but wherever any two of them met, they appeared instantly to recognise each other; and, by a quiet unobtrusive, but steady movement forward, they gradually made their way one by one through the crowd, to the immediate vicinity of the scaffold. Another circumstance, also, was remarked by those people in the crowd who occupied all their vacant moments by looking about them, which was, that, close to the head of one of the bands of the burgher guard, and conversing from time to time with the officer who commanded it, appeared a young man of a powerful and active form, dressed as a common man-at-arms, with the beaver of his helmet at what was called the half-spring; in short, so far open as to give him plenty of air, yet not sufficiently thrown up to expose his face. In those days, it must be remembered that the appearance of men in armour had

nothing extraordinary in it, either in the country or the town, and consequently such a sight was not at all uncommon in the streets of Ghent at any time; but had become far more so since the burghers had assumed the authority they now claimed, as not a few of the rich young merchants, every now and then, chose to ape the nobles, whom they were desirous of overthrowing; and would appear in the streets clothed, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, in complete steel.

Whether the captain of the band to whom the stranger addressed himself was or was not previously acquainted with the man-at-arms, he seemed well pleased with his company, which certainly somewhat tended to relieve the irksome anticipation of a disagreeable duty. Their conversation, however, soon appeared to turn upon more important matters; and they spoke quick and eagerly, though in so low a tone that only a few words of what they said reached the bystanders.

"I wish them no ill, poor wretches, God knows," the captain of the band was heard to say, in reply to something the other had whispered the moment before. Two or three indistinct sentences succeeded; and then, he again answered, "If any one would begin I would follow! we have as good a right to a say in the matter as any one else."

Again the man-at-arms spoke with him rapidly; and the other rejoined in a low and hurried tone—"Stay! I will see what the men say! Stand back, sir!" he added, pushing back, angrily, one of the crowd, who intruded upon the open space, and came within earshot. He then walked leisurely along the file of men that he commanded, speaking a few words, now to one, now to another; and then, turning back with an air of assumed indifference, he said to the person with whom he had before been speaking, "It will do! They do not want any more blood spilt. They are all murmuring, to a man. Go and speak with the captain on the other side."

While this was passing in the immediate vicinity of the scaffold, several of the persons I have described as looking like weather-beaten peasants had, in making their way through the crowd, paused to speak with a number of the citizens; at first asking some questions in regard to the multitude, and the dark preparations before the town-house, as if ignorant of what had lately taken place in the city. They then generally proceeded

to comment on the reply made to them; and then something was always said about the shame and horror of staining their market-place with public executions for state crimes which the events of a few weeks might render no crimes at all.

Thus, one of them demanded of a fat burgher, by whom he passed, "Why, what is the matter, neighbour? This looks as if they were going to cut off some one's head."

"And so they are, to be sure," replied the citizen. "They are going to do execution upon the Lord of Imbercourt, and Hugonet the chancellor, who were condemned this morning for treating with France and receiving bribes."

"Ay, did they receive bribes?" rejoined the peasant: "that is strange enough; for I always thought that they were as free and liberal of their gold to those who needed it as any men living, and coveted nothing belonging to another; and those are not the sort of men, I have heard say, who usually receive bribes."

"Ay, that is true enough, indeed!" answered the citizen, with a sigh.

"But did they really receive bribes?" persevered the peasant. "Was it clearly proved?"

"No, no, I believe not," replied the citizen. "Proof they could not get—proof they could not get; but there was strong suspicion."

"'Tis hard a man should die for mere suspicion, though; for who would be safe if that were law?" answered the other. "If I had been one of them, I would have appealed to the King of France and Court of Peers."

"Why, so they both did," replied the citizen; "but they are to die for all that."

"Then I would not be a citizen of Ghent for ten thousand crowns," answered the peasant; "for, by the Lord, Louis and his peers will be like to hang every one of them that he catches; and it is a sad thing to be hanged for spilling innocent blood. Were I one of the citizens of Ghent, they should never stain the market-place in such a way while I had a voice to raise against it."

"Ay, ay, it is very sad!" said the citizen: "and I dare say if any one would begin, many a man would cry out against it too."

"Well, well," answered the other; "I must forward,

and see what is going on; and I hope some one *will* cry out against it."

Thus speaking, the peasant, as he seemed to be, pushed his way on for a little distance, and then, pausing by another of the citizens, held with him a short conversation, like that which we have just narrated, asking very nearly the same questions, and making very nearly the same observations on the answers he received.

The instance which has just been particularized was only one out of many; for in every part of the crowd were to be seen persons similar in appearance to the man whose conversation we have just detailed, and who acted precisely upon the same plan, though the words they made use of might be slightly different. The man-at-arms who had been talking with the captain of one of the city bands, in accordance with the intimation he had received, was, in the mean time, making his way round to speak with the person who commanded the company at the other side of the scaffold. As, in his apparent military capacity, he strode boldly across the space kept clear in front of the scaffold, and consequently encountered none of the impediments which might have delayed him, had he attempted to proceed through the crowd, he would, probably, soon have accomplished this purpose; but at that moment a considerable noise and disturbance was heard in the direction of the town-house, mingled with shouts of "They are coming!—they are coming!"

The ear of the man-at-arms immediately caught the sound. He paused for a single instant; and then taking a step back to a spot whence he could descry the intermediate space between the scaffold and the town-house, he saw a body of people moving from the principal entrance of that edifice, through a double line of the burgher guard. The procession consisted of a number of the municipal council, a body of various officers of the state, Maillotin du Bac the prévôt maréchal, two executioners with naked axes, and the unfortunate nobles Imbercourt and Hugonet, bound and bareheaded.

The man-at-arms instantly perceived that he would not have time to accomplish what he proposed; and with three strides he placed himself once more by the side of the officer with whom he had before been speaking. Gathered at the same point were, by this time, at least a hundred and fifty of the peasant-looking men whom we

have before described; and, forcing their way through the crowd in every direction, with no longer any affectation of ceremony, or regard to the convenience of those they thrust out of their way, there appeared a number of others perfectly similar in appearance. The eyes of the whole of this distinct body were evidently turned upon the man-at-arms; and it was observed that the one who stood nearest to him held something enveloped in the flap of his coarse brown coat, as if to be given at a moment's notice.

"Now," said the man-at-arms, addressing the captain of the burgher guard, "do your duty as a brave man, as a good citizen, and more,—as a good Christian, and you shall have plenty of support."

"But who are you?" demanded the captain of the guard, eying him eagerly:—"who are you, who so boldly promise support in such a case as this?"

"I am the Vert Gallant of Hannut," replied the man-at-arms; and at the same moment, stretching back his hand to the peasant behind him, he received a broad green scarf and plume, the one of which he fastened instantly in his casque, and waved the other, for a moment, high in the air before he threw it over his shoulder.

The signal had an instantaneous effect. The brown coarse coats of the peasants were thrown off, and they appeared armed in steel corslets and brassards, while the distinctive marks of the well-known green riders of Hannut were seen boldly displayed in the midst of the streets of Ghent. Although where each of these men was making his way onward, and at the point where so many had already congregated, this sudden change occasioned a considerable sensation; yet the great body of the crowd was agitated by so many different feelings, and the general tumult was at that moment so great, that the transaction passed with only casual notice. Almost every one throughout the multitude was, indeed, moved by sensations of his own; and each nearly at once gave voice to those feelings, as his eye happened to catch different points in the scene that was passing in the square.

"They are coming! they are coming!" shouted some.—"Where! where!" exclaimed others.—"Who the devil are these!" cried those who saw the green riders.—"Death to the enemies of Ghent!" vociferated

the fierce.—"Poor wretches! will no mercy be shown to them?" said the pitiful.—"What a large axe! how pale they look! Who are those behind?" cried others of the crowd.

In the mean while, the mournful procession came on. The new eschevins of Ghent, elected by the people themselves, mounted the scaffold, and ranged themselves around, to see the sentence they had lately pronounced carried into execution. The two executioners took their places by the blocks, and leaned the axes which they bore against them; while they made themselves ready to go through the preparatory part of their sad function. The condemned nobles followed after; and several members of the municipal council—but Albert Maurice was not among them—closed the whole, and occupied the only vacant space left at the back of the scaffold. At the same moment a gentleman in splendid arms, half-concealed under a surcoat of costly embroidery, followed by a number of richly-dressed attendants, forced his way rudely through the crowd, and thrust himself close to the foot of the scaffold, on the opposite side to that where the Vert Gallant had placed himself. He then crossed his arms upon his broad, bull-like chest, and stood gazing upon the awful scene that was proceeding above, with a look of ruthless satisfaction.

The Lord of Imbercourt at once advanced to the front of the scaffold, and gazed round upon the multitude before him. He was very pale, it is true; but his step was as firm as when he strode the council-chamber in the height of his power: and not a quiver of the lip, not a twinkle of the eyelid, betrayed that there was such a thing as fear at his heart.

"Must I die with my hands tied, like a common felon?" he said, addressing the executioner.

"Not if your lordship is prepared to die without offering resistance," replied the other.

"I am prepared, sir," answered Imbercourt, "to die as I have lived, calmly, honestly, fearlessly."

The executioner began to untie his hands; and the Vert Gallant, giving one glance round the crowd, apparently to ascertain the proximity of his followers, drew forward his sword-belt, and loosened the weapon in the sheath. Imbercourt at the same time was advancing as far as possible, as if to address the people, and the whole multitude, seeing it, kept a profound silence; when

suddenly, in the midst of the still hush—just as the Vert Gallant of Hannut was passing round the head of the file of burgher guards, till he was within a few steps of the scaffold itself—a sweet and plaintive voice, which would have been inaudible under any other circumstances, was heard from among the crowd exclaiming, "Oh, let me pass; for God's sake let me pass! they are murdering my faithful servants. Let me pass, in pity, in mercy let me pass!"

"It is the princess! it is the princess!" cried a number of voices: "let her pass! let her pass!" and, by an involuntary movement of feeling and compassion, the people drew hastily back on either side, and Mary of Burgundy, in the deep mourning of an orphan, with her bright hair escaped from her veil, and flowing wide over her shoulders, her face deluged in tears, and her hands clasped in agony, rushed forward into the open space, and, casting herself upon her knees before the people of Ghent, exclaimed aloud the only words she could utter, "Oh, spare them—spare them!"*

"Yes, yes," cried an honest burgher from the crowd, "we will spare them. Out upon it! has not the prince always had power to show mercy? Hark ye, neighbours, pikes and swords for Martin Fruse! On upon the scaffold! We will save them!"

"Back, false citizen; back!" cried the cavalier in the glittering dress we have described. "What, would you interrupt the course of justice? By the sun in heaven they shall die the death;" and, drawing his sword, he threw himself between the people and the scaffold.

All was now tumult and confusion; and in one instant it seemed as if a general spirit of civil strife had seized upon every part of the multitude. Some shouted, "Mercy for them! mercy for them!" Some, "Justice! justice! slay the traitors!" Pikes were crossed, and swords were drawn on all sides. The burgher guards were as divided as the people. Mary of Burgundy was borne fainting behind the scaffold; and those upon the scaffold itself seemed paralyzed by surprise and fear. But the green scarfs and burgonets of the riders of Hannut were seen forcing their way forward through the press, in spite of all opposition; and at the same moment the thundering voice of the Vert Gallant was heard rising,

* It may be necessary to inform those who are not deeply read in the chronicles of France, that this fact is minutely accurate.

above every thing else, "On, on to the scaffold, friends of mercy!" he cried. "Lord of Imbercourt, cast yourself over, you are among friends!"

Imbercourt might have done so; but he was instantly seized by Maillotin du Bac, and one of the executioners, who unhappily awoke from their first consternation in time to prevent him from seizing the opportunity which was unexpectedly presented to him. The Vert Gallant, however, pushed forward, sword in hand. All gave way, or went down before him; the pikes opposed to his breast shivered like withered boughs beneath his arm; and he was within a yard of the spot where Imbercourt stood, when he was encountered, hand to hand, by the cavalier we have before mentioned; and each found that he had met an enemy very different from the burghers by whom they were surrounded. Each was powerful and skilful; but the Vert Gallant had, by more than twenty years, the advantage of his adversary; and feeling that the fate of Imbercourt must be decided in the twinkling of an eye—for the guards and executioners were forcing him down to the block—he showered his blows upon his adversary with a thundering rapidity that in a moment brought him upon his knees. He was still, however, between the young cavalier and the scaffold; and, fierce with the eagerness of the encounter, Hugh of Gueldres drew back his arm, to plunge the point of his sword into the throat of his opponent, when the voice of one of the cavalier's attendants exclaimed aloud, "Save the duke, for God's sake! Save the Duke of Gueldres! Forbear, forbear!"

The Vert Gallant paused, gazing upon his prostrate enemy, with feelings that can be understood when we remember that it was his own father who, beaten down by his superior strength, lay within an inch of his sword's point, raised for the purpose of terminating their struggle by his parent's death. His eyes grew dim—his brain reeled—the sword dropped from his hand, and he fell back upon the pavement, without power or consciousness.

At the same moment, the axe of the executioner swung high in the air—there was a dull, heavy blow—a rush of dark blood poured over the scaffold; and the Lord of Imbercourt was no more.

CHAPTER X.

It is a sad thing for a calm, retired student to sit down and depict the fierce and terrible passions which sometimes animate his fellow-beings; and it is scarcely possible to tell how worn and shaken his whole frame feels, after hurrying through some scene of angry violence and wild commotion. He meets, indeed, with compensations in pursuing his task. There may be a high and indescribable pleasure in portraying the better qualities of human nature in all their grand and beautiful traits; in describing sweet scenes of nature, and in striving to find latent associations between the various aspects of the lovely universe and the mind, the feelings, or the fate of ourselves and our fellow-men. Nay, more, there may be some touch of satisfaction—part self-complacency, part gratified curiosity—in tracing the petty qualities of humanity mingling with the finer ones, the mighty and the mean counterbalancing each other within the same bosom; and in discovering that the noblest of recorded earthly beings is linked on to our little selves by some fond familiar fault or empty vanity. But at the same time, though not so wearing as to paint the struggle of mighty energies called forth on some great occasion, it is even more painful, perhaps, to sit and draw the same strong passions working by inferior means, and employing the low and treacherous slave *Cunning*, instead of the bold bravo *Daring*. To such a picture, however, we must now turn.

It was on the evening of the day whose sanguinary commencement we have already noticed, that, placed calmly by a clear wood fire, with all the means of comfort, and even luxury around him, Ganay the druggist sat pondering over the past and the future. Neither he himself nor Albert Maurice had appeared at the execution of Imbercourt and Hugonet—the one careless of what else occurred, so that his bitter revenge was gratified, the other naturally abhorring scenes of blood. The druggist, however,—though where it was necessary

he neither wanted courage to undertake nor hardihood to execute the most daring actions,—was ever well pleased to let more careless fools perform the perilous parts of an enterprise, employing the time which would have been thus filled up by action in thinking over the best means of reaping his own peculiar harvest from the seed sown by others. He now revolved every circumstance of his present situation, and scanned the future—that dim and uncertain prospect—with steady eyes, determined to force his way onward through its mists and obstacles, without fear and without remorse. The predominant sensation in his bosom, however, was gratification at the consummation of his long-sought revenge. The man whom he most hated on earth, who had offered him a personal indignity, and who had refused pardon to his son, he had sent to join the unhappy magistrates who had condemned that base and flagitious boy; and when he contemplated the difficulties he had surmounted to bring about that act of vengeance,—the schemes he had formed and perfected,—the events which he had turned from their natural course, by his sole art, to accomplish his purpose,—the men he had used as instruments, and the passions he had bent to his designs;—when he contemplated, I say, the whole course of his triumphant machinations, there rose up in his bosom that triumph of successful villany which is so often the ultimate means of its own punishment by the daring confidence which it inspires.

The maxim of Rochefoucault is applicable to men as well as women. Where was there ever the man who paused at one evil act? Ganay had previously determined to limit all his efforts to the death of the eschevins and of Imbercourt; but his very success in that endeavour had entailed the necessity, and furnished the encouragement, to new and, if possible, less justifiable acts. Nevertheless, it must not be thought that there was no such thing as a thrill of remorse ever entered his bosom. There probably never yet was a man, however he might brave it to the world, who, with a bosom loaded with crimes, did not feel remorse when solitary thought left him a prey to memory. Conscience is an Antæus, that, though often cast to the earth by the Herculean passions of man's heart, rises ever again reinvigorated by its fall; and he must be strong indeed who can strangle it altogether. Remorse mingled its

bitter drop even with Ganay's triumph; and while he gazed upon the crackling embers, the joy of his successes faded away—a feeling of age, and solitude, and crime crept over his heart; and the memories of other years, the hopes and dreams of boyhood and innocence rose up, and painfully contrasted themselves with the mighty disappointment of successful vice. Through life he had found many means of stifling such murmurs of the heart, in the excitement of new schemes and the intricacies of tortuous policy; but now he had learned another way of lulling the mind together with the body, and, rising with his usual calm and quiet pace, he approached a cupboard, poured a small silver cup half-full of ardent spirits, and then swallowed in its contents a certain portion of that narcotic which he had found so soothing under the first anguish of his son's death. Then carefully replacing the cup and the vial, he again took his seat before the fire, and listened, as if waiting for some visiter.

He was not kept long in expectation; for, in a very few minutes after, the door was opened by the boy, and Maillotin du Bac entered, without further announcement. The cheek of the prévôt was flushed with wine, and his lip curled with triumph; but he had, by this time, learned the influence of Ganay in the affairs of Ghent too completely to treat him with aught but the most profound deference. After some formality, he took the seat that Ganay offered; and hypocras and wine having been brought in, with spices and comfits, he helped himself largely, and then, at the request of the druggist, recapitulated the events connected with the execution of the morning, which we need not repeat.

"So now," said the prévôt, in conclusion, speaking of the unhappy Imbercourt, "he is dead, and that score is cleared. Master Ganay, I give you joy, with all my heart! Your son's death is nobly avenged, and you can sleep in peace. Now, give me joy in return."

"I do! I do! sir prévôt," replied Ganay, grasping the hand the other held out to him in his thin fingers: "I do! I do, with all my heart!"

"But stay! stay!" cried Maillotin du Bac; "you do not yet know for what. Hark ye, Master Ganay, revenge is sweet to every honorable man. Did you ever hear tell of the Vert Gallant of Hannut? Did you ever hear how he overpowered me by numbers, and dis-

graced me as a man and a knight? He delivered you proud Albert Maurice, too, when he was a less worm than he is now. Well, he it was who, as I tell you, encountered the good Duke of Gueldres, and would have slain him, had not his own foot slipped, or some one dashed him down, and the duke was rescued."

"Well, well, what of him?" cried the druggist; "what has befallen him?"

"Why, he is safe in the prison of the town-house," replied the prévôt, "and shall die after seven days' torture, if I live to the end of them. His fellows, somehow, cut their way through, and got out of the press, every one of them; but he himself was trodden down as he lay by the people, and was taken up by the burgher guard half-dead, after the crowd dispersed. We shall have to give him two or three days to recover. There is no use of killing him like a rat caught in a trap, you know, and just knocking his head against the stones, without letting him know why or wherefore. No, no, we must give him time to recover his strength and his senses, or he will die upon the first wheel. But there is more, there is more to be told still," cried the prévôt, rather heated by the wine, and seeing that the other was about to reply: "Who, think you, this famous long-concealed Vert Gallant proves to be at last? Who but the nephew of that old sorcerer, the Lord of Hannut—and by the holy cross, if ever I live to see quiet times again, that vile, heathenish wizard shall roast in the market-place of Brussels, if there be such a thing as law and religion in [illegible]land. I knew it all the time! Bless you, Master G[illegible], I saw through it all, from the time I was at the castle: I told the Lord of Imbercourt that his nephew was the brigand leader,—you may ask him if I did not,—though, by-the-way, he won't answer, for he is dead—but I told him, nevertheless, that I was sure it was the old man's nephew.—Master Ganay, here's to you!"

Ganay had turned somewhat pale as the other spoke; but he showed no further sign of discomposure: and replied, immediately, "His nephew! you must mistake. He has no nephew. He once had a son!" he added, in a voice, the tremulous tone of which the prévôt, whose faculties had not been rendered more pellucid by the wine he had drunk, attributed to the painful remembrance of his own loss,—"he once had a son! But the boy died in infancy."

"Nay," replied Maillotin du Bac, "of that I know nothing. All I know is that this youth is his nephew —this Sir Hugh de Mortmar."

"But I tell thee, good friend, it cannot be," rejoined the druggist, somewhat sharply. "No nephew has he. Surely I should know."

"Well, well, 'tis all the same," cried the prévôt. "If not his nephew, he passes as such; and die he shall, after the torture has racked his every limb. Ay, Master Ganay, he shall die," he added, clasping his strong and sinewy hand tight, as if holding some substance which he was determined to let no power on earth wring from his grasp; "he shall die, although your precious president were to give his right hand to save him; and if, out of what he calls his fine feelings, he attempt to repay the good turn the Vert Gallant did him at Hannut, and free him from prison in return, he may chance to stumble at that step himself, and die along with him. I owe him something, too, which I have not forgot. So let him look to it."

Ganay mused for several minutes over the words of his companion, who spoke evidently under the excitement both of passion and drink. The wine, however, had not very deeply affected his discretion; and the moment after, remembering the close connexion between the druggist and Albert Maurice, the prévôt added, "Not that I mean any harm to your friend, Master Ganay, only let him not meddle with my prisoner, that is all. I am sure I have not sought any vengeance against him himself, simply because he is your friend; and will not, if he keep his hands from interfering with my affairs."

Still Ganay was silent, and remained musing, with his eyes bent upon the fire, till he perceived that Maillotin du Bac,—somewhat discomposed by his companion's taciturnity, and imagining that he had made a blunder in regard to Albert Maurice—was again about to apply to the bowl of spiced wines, as the best means of restoring his confidence and composure. At that moment the druggist, stretching out his hand, caught him gently by the arm, saying, "Stay, stay, master prévôt, we have both had enough of that for the present; and as we may have many things to speak of which require cool heads, let us refrain till all is settled, and then drink our fill."

"Well, well, 'tis the same to me," rejoined the prévôt, relinquishing the bowl, and taking his seat once again. "What would you say, Master Ganay? Command me; for you know that we are linked together by the same interests, and therefore are not likely to differ."

"Well, then, listen for a moment, good Sir Maillotin, while I just tell you a few things concerning this Lord of Hannut, which, though they belong to the days past, do not the less bear upon the days present."

The druggist then paused, and again mused for a moment in deep thought, ere he proceeded; and in his countenance there was that air of deep calculating thought which may often be seen in the face of a skilful chess-player, when pausing, with suspended finger, over some critical move. At length he went on. "We must both serve each other, Sir Maillotin; and if you will aid me in what I propose, I will help you to what you wish, though you dare not even hope for it."

"Speak, speak! Master Ganay," replied the prévôt; "and fear not that I will refuse to serve you willingly and well. We have drawn vastly well together yet; and there is no danger of our not doing so to the end."

Still, however, the druggist hesitated for some minutes; for though he could assume a false frankness as well as any one, he was not, by nature, at all communicative, and what he had resolved, upon long deliberation, to propose to the prévôt, required a more full confidence than he could place in any one without pain. "I will tell you a story," he said, at length,—"I will tell you a story, good Maillotin du Bac. Listen then. 'Tis just two-and-thirty years ago since I first heard much of this Lord of Hannut, who was then a bright, brave young cavalier, whose life was not to be counted on for two hours together, so much was his courage better than his prudence. He had—as well you know he still has—ample wealth and large possessions, while his cousin, the present Duke of Gueldres, whose father was then living, was so munificent a prince, as often to be pinched for a hundred florins. Report said that the young duke, who was then heir to Hannut, piously wished that his gallant cousin might find the road to heaven speedily. But, as fate would have it, the Lord of Hannut one day unexpectedly married, and within a year his fair lady made him the father of a son, of which

she was delivered at their pleasure-house of Lindenmar. All this went mightily against the stomach of the good young Lord of Gueldres, whose father, then living, kept him on scanty means; when, by another strange turn of fate, the pleasure-house of Lindenmar was burnt to the ground, and the infant son of the young Lord of Hannut perished in the flames. As fortune would have it, a detachment of Duke Philip's army was marching over the hill, within sight, at the time, and with it was my good Lord of Gueldres, together with Thibalt of Neufchatel, and a number of other knights and nobles. As soon as the fire was discovered, they all galloped down to put out the flames; and my Lord of Gueldres might have passed for as zealous a friend as the rest, had he not been fool enough to cry out, as if in jest, to let the whole place burn, so that he had the lands of Hannut."

"He had better have kept that to himself," interrupted the prévôt, shaking his head sagaciously. "No man has a worse enemy than his own tongue. The good duke should have learned better than to let people know his wishes, for they are never long in discovering one's designs afterward."

"He has marred all his good fortune through life," replied Ganay, "by those rough sayings of his. For though he says no more than other men think, yet he makes all men that hear him his enemies, by exposing their feelings while confessing his own.

"However," continued the druggist, after this sage and liberal observation, "down he came with the rest, of course, to make them think what he had said was a mere joke, and plunged into the flames with the foremost. All was confusion, and no one knew what the other was doing. The Lord of Hannut himself was stunned by the fall of a beam upon his head, and was with difficulty dragged out by his servants. Thibalt of Neufchatel, his great friend and brother-in-arms, carried out the lady unhurt, through the midst of the flames; but the heir of Hannut perished; and for some hours no one could tell what had become of Adolphus of Gueldres."

"Why, you describe it all as well as if you had been there yourself," said Maillotin du Bac.

"I was there," replied the druggist dryly; "but you shall hear. What put it into Thibalt of Neufchatel's head,

I know not: but after saving the lady, he rushed back again into the house; and finding me in the farther wing, he dragged me out by the hair of the head, vowing that I had kindled the fire. Now you must know that I was then an humble friend and domestic surgeon to the young Duke of Gueldres; and when they searched my person, they found a number of letters which they thought of very doubtful meaning, and a few drugs, the use of which their ignorance could not comprehend, and which they wanted much to prove were materials for secretly lighting a flame. The good duke, too, was not present; and under all these circumstances, they had nearly killed me on the spot. I took it all silently, for a man can but die once in this world, and very little does it matter when that once may fall. All I said was, to call my lord, for that he would clear me; and they agreed, at length, to spare me till the duke, that is at present, could be found. He was not heard of, however, till the next day, when it was discovered that he had retired to a neighbouring village much scorched by the flames. He instantly despatched a letter to the Lord of Neufchatel, informing him that he himself had sent me to inquire after the health of his fair cousins, the Lord and Lady of Hannut, which was the cause that I had not been seen accompanying him with the rest of the army. The servants of the household of Lindenmar vouched for my coming the evening before on that errand, and gave a good report of my proceedings. The Lord of Hannut himself joined to exculpate me; and I easily found means to convince Thibalt of Neufchatel that he had grossly ill-treated me, and foully aspersed my character. Had he continued to treat me ill, I might have devised a way to satisfy myself; but, on the contrary, as soon as he was convinced of my innocence, nothing would serve him to testify his sorrow for what had occurred, and to compensate the injury he had inflicted. He kept his eye upon me through life, and, I may well say, has been the origin of all my fortunes. The proofs he gathered together of the charge against me, and of my innocence, he has always kept in his own possession; and I have not chosen to press for their being given up to me, lest it should seem that I was afraid of any thing therein contained. Do you understand me?"

"Quite well," replied Maillotin du Bac, drawing his clear hawk's eyes together, with a shrewd glance upon the druggist's face; "quite well. What more?"

"Why, this," answered the druggist:—"I love not to be in the power of any man. While Adolphus of Gueldres was in prison, and likely to remain there,—while Thibalt of Neufchatel was living, and likely to live,—the matter did not much signify; but now that Adolphus of Gueldres is free, and that Thibalt of Neufchatel is dying of the wounds he received at Nancy, it might be as well that those papers were in my own possession. Thus, then, it must be managed, sir prévôt; you must find some excuse to take possession of his house with your men-at-arms the moment the breath is out of his body; and while you are sealing up the effects, I may be looking for the papers."

"But what, suppose I keep them in my possession for you?" demanded Maillotin du Bac, with one of his shrewd looks.

"Why, then," replied the druggist calmly, "I cannot aid you in overthrowing Albert Maurice, and in obtaining possession of his person and his wealth."

"I understand," said the prévôt; "we are agreed. But what surety have I that you will do so when you have the papers?"

"This," answered Ganay, without any expression of indignation at a doubt of his honesty, which he felt to be perfectly natural, but, at the same time, approaching closer to the prévôt, and speaking in a low, but clear and emphatic tone,—"this, that Albert Maurice—by what means I know not—has discovered my secret, and must die."

"Good! good!" replied the prévôt; "'tis better than a bond! We are agreed, we are agreed, mine excellent good friend. But, hark ye, Ganay, there is one bad stone in the arch. This Thibalt of Neufchatel—this good Count Thibalt—is marvellously better to-day. It would seem that the death of Imbercourt and Hugonet had done him good; for about the time of the axe falling he began to mend."

Ganay, as was his habit when he heard any unpalatable tidings, replied naught, but fixed his eyes upon the fire and mused. "He is an old man," said the druggist, at length, speaking in a low and quiet voice,—"he is an old man, this good Count Thibalt."

"Ay, doubtless is he," replied Maillotin du Bac, who was one of those people who take a keen delight in discovering difficulties and objections solely for the sake of giving pain and disappointment; "but he is a hale old man, and may live these twenty years, if he get over this bout."

"He must have had enough of life," continued Ganay, in the same meditative tone. "It is time he were asleep. Adolphus of Gueldres has visited his sick couch more than once: it is time he were asleep."

The prévôt was silent; and Ganay, after considering his hawk-like features for a moment or two with an inquiring glance, added quietly, "Well, well, Sir Maillotin, we will see. These sudden gleams of convalescence often precede death in the badly wounded. I know these matters better than you do, my good friend; and I have no faith in this sudden and strange amendment. Let us keep ourselves in readiness, and wait the result. You will be prepared at a moment's notice," he added, in a more sharp and decided tone, throwing off at once the quiet conversational manner of his former speech: "perchance he may die to-morrow—perchance the next day; but be you on the watch, and ever ready to secure the house."

"I will! I will!" answered Maillotin du Bac; and then speaking to the druggist's purpose more than to his words, he added, "I will be ready to secure the house and all that, Master Ganay; but I can do no more in this business. To take men off except by the cord or the steel, when they have merited their fate, is out of my line of operations."

"Who required you to do so?" demanded the druggist, gravely. "No, no, sir prévôt, men may die without your help or mine either. So, now to the bowl! We understand each other, and that is enough. Be you ready when I send to warn you that the good count is dead. If he live, you know—which is likely—vastly likely; if he live—why all the rest is in the moon. Sir prévôt, I carouse to your good rest this night. Do me justice—do me justice in the bowl!"

Thus ended their more important conversation; and all that passed further referred to the mysteries of the tankard, and need not be here inflicted on the reader. It may be necessary to observe, however, that the druggist, did not suffer the prévôt marechal to leave his

house till he had imbibed a sufficient quantity of various kinds of intoxicating liquors to require the aid of two stout men to bear him home; and that Ganay himself was, at the same time, incapable of quitting the chair in which he sat. It may be asked, was a man of such subtle schemes an habitual drunkard, then? Far from it, though he could drink as deep as any one when some object might be gained by so doing: but he was one of those men whose limbs only become inebriated, if we may use such an expression, while their brain remains unclouded; and the debauch in which he indulged was one of calculation, not pleasure. He had soon seen that, in the case of the prévôt, the prudent guard which was usually placed upon his lips was half-asleep at his post long before their conversation was over; and though he believed that he could trust to old habits of caution to keep his companion from any indiscreet babbling, either drunk or sober, yet he determined not to let him leave his dwelling till utterance itself was drowned in wine. Of himself he had no fear; and, leaning on his boy, he tottered to his bed in silence.

CHAPTER XI.

Oh, the dull silent hours of the night, when not a sound stirs upon the heavy air to steal one thought from man's communion with his own dark heart!—when the stern silence renders the sleep that covers all the world more like one universal death, and every thing around us bids our conscience scan the brief records of our past existence, and prejudge us for the long eternity! The days had been, when, on a clear spring-tide night, like that,—while all the countless stars seemed living diamonds in the heaven,—Albert Maurice, full of fine soul and noble aspirations, would have gazed forth enchanted; and without one heavy tie between his heart and the low earth, would have bade his spirit soar up in grand calm dreams to heaven—when, between him and the multitude of bright orbs that sparkled before his eyes, there would have been felt a communion and a sympathy; and when the knowledge that each won-

drous frame was the creation of the same Almighty hand, would have awakened in his bosom a feeling of kindred with the living lights of the sky. But now, how heavy was the night! how dark! how hopeless! how reproachful! There was a voice even in the solemn stillness; and the blood which yet reeked upon the scaffold beneath the very windows of the apartment where he sat seemed crying up, through the silence of the universe, to the Judge enthroned above those eternal stars.

He was left, too, entirely alone, and had been so during the greater part of the day; for such was the awful sensation produced in Ghent by the events of the morning, that all the shops were shut, and every kind of business was very generally suspended. Even the affairs of the city seemed to be neglected by general consent. Neither the council of the town, nor the deputies of the states, returned to consult over the future; nor was it the higher functionaries alone that seemed to feel this sort of bewildered apath[redacted] The clerks and secretaries were absent; not above one or two of the many couriers usually in attendance were now found in readiness; and Albert Maurice, after having endeavoured, in vain, to occupy his mind with business during the day, found himself at night left in utter solitude, to revolve the tragedy of the morning, without any other thing to distract his thoughts, or any voice to plead his cause against the accusation of his own conscience.

He strove, however, to convince himself that he had acted justly. He read over the evidence against the dead. He read over the sentence of the judges. He thought over all the many specious reasons that had before seemed to afford a thousand clear and patriotic excuses for sweeping away those whose views were likely to thwart his own; but the reasons had lost their force; the sentence was manifestly unjust; the evidence was broken and inconclusive. At all events, he thought the act was not his; the award had been pronounced by the lawful magistrates of the land; and he had taken no part either in the judgment or its execution. But that pretext would not avail a moment before the stern inquisitor within; and he felt that he, in whom the real power lay, if he did not interpose to shield the innocent, made himself responsible for their blood.

The heart of man cannot long endure such racking self-

examination; and the most dangerous resource, but the only refuge from present pain, is flight from thought. As sad an hour's commune with himself as ever sinful human being passed, ended in a resolution to think no more of the unchangeable hours of the past, and to fix his mind upon the present. After pausing for a moment, during which his ideas wandered confusedly over a number of objects, without finding any subject of contemplation of sufficient importance to hold his thoughts, for an instant, from the engrossing theme that ever called them back with painful importunity, some sudden memory seemed to come across him; and taking up one of the lamps, he proceeded into the antechamber, in which waited several of his attendants. Giving the light to a page, with orders to go on before, the young citizen paced slowly through several of the halls and corridors of the town-house, his footfall, ever firm and proud, taking now a more heavy and determined step, from the feeling of the dark, stern deeds which he had done. Descending one of the staircases, he came to that portion of the building which was set apart as the municipal prison; and proceeding to a small chamber or lodge, he demanded the keys of the jailer, who was dozing by the fire.

The man immediately delivered them; and, passing onward, the president of the states entered the gloomy dwelling, and descended the staircase which led to the lowest chambers of the prison. He was surprised, however, to perceive a light; and in a moment after, in the low passage which ran between six or seven small heavy archways leading to the cells, his eye fell upon a trooper of the prévôt's guard, seated upon a stone-bench at the end, employed in furbishing the steel of his partisan by the light of a lamp above his head.

The man instantly started on his feet; and, challenging the party that approached, advanced his weapon, till it nearly touched the bosom of the page. But Albert Maurice, stepping past the boy, put the pike aside, and demanded sternly what the soldier did there in the municipal prison.

He was there, the man replied, by order of his captain, and was commanded to give admission to none, but the jailer with food for the prisoner.

"Your officer is somewhat too bold!" replied the young burgher, "and must answer for having dared to place a sentry where he himself has no authority. Get

thee gone, good fellow—you know me—get thee gone, and let me not see your face within these walls again."

The man at first hesitated; and at length refused to obey, alleging, civilly, the commands of his own captain, which he was bound to follow. Well knowing the station and power of the person whom he addressed, he spoke with courtesy and respect; but Albert Maurice was in that state of dissatisfied irritation, which the first reproaches of conscience leave upon a fine and energetic mind; and, returning to the upper chambers, he instantly summoned a guard, caused the soldier to be disarmed, and confined him in one of the very dungeons he had been placed to watch.

There was a stern fierceness in the whole proceeding, unlike his usual decisive but mild demeanour; and those who watched him well remarked, that upon his mind and character, through the whole course of his life, that day had left a trace which no after-events could obliterate. When he had seen his orders obeyed, he dismissed the guard, and bidding the page wait him on the stairs, he advanced alone to one of the cells and applied the various keys he carried to the lock. It was some time before he found the right one; and he thought he heard more than one low groan, while employed in opening the door. At length, however, he succeeded, and entered the dungeon, which was dark and dismal enough.

Stripped of arms, both offensive and defensive, and stretched upon a pile of straw, lay the gallant and enterprising Hugh de Mortmar, as we have generally called him, with every limb powerless and rigid, in consequence of the trampling and blows he had received while trodden under foot in the market-place. His fine head leaned languidly upon his arm, while with a motion which, however slight, seemed full of anguish, he turned a little as he lay, to see who it was that visited his prison. The light, for a moment, dazzled his eyes; but when he perceived the face of Albert Maurice, a slight smile of pleasure played on his lip. It was a face he knew—it was a being on whom he had some claim that came to visit him; and it is only necessary to think over his situation—friendless, a prisoner, and alone, with every mental power oppressed, and every corporeal faculty rigid and benumbed—to comprehend what joy such a sight would give, however criminal he might hold some of his visiter's deeds to be.

The young citizen set down the lamp, and seated himself on a rude wooden settle, which was the only article of furniture that the place contained. Bending down his head over the prisoner, he said, in a kind and gentle tone, "Do you remember me?"

"Well, very well," replied the young cavalier, faintly; "we have changed stations since we met."

"You shall find me ready," replied Albert Maurice, "to follow the good example you then set me, and to give you back freedom, for the freedom you then gave me."

Hugh de Mortmar shook his head mournfully, and cast his eyes upon his stiff and rigid limbs, as if to express the impossibility of his accepting the proffered liberation.

"Fear not, fear not!" said Albert Maurice, in reply to this mute language. "Fear not; in two or three days you will be able to use your limbs as freely as ever, and I will find means to remove from them all other thraldom."

"But my father," said Hugh de Mortmar. "Tell me, I beseech you, tell me!—Is he safe? Is he unhurt?"

"Your father!" repeated Albert Maurice, in some surprise,—"your father!"

"Yes, yes," cried the prisoner, raising himself as well as he could upon his arm,—"my father—the Duke of Gueldres!—Is he safe? Is he unhurt? I struck him down before I knew him; but I do not think he was injured."

"No, no," replied the young citizen, "the duke is safe and well. But this, indeed, is a strange tale. I do not comprehend you well, I fear," he added, inclined to believe that the injuries the prisoner had received had rendered him delirious. "Can the Duke of Gueldres be your father? I never heard that he had more than one child, who was slain, they say, by one of the cruel soldiers of the late Duke of Burgundy's father, when Adolphus of Gueldres himself was taken near Namur. I remember all the circumstances; for there was many an event occurred about that time which impressed the whole story more deeply on my memory than other things that have happened since. I was then a boy, travelling with my uncle through the forest of Hannut, and we had been at Namur not three days before."

"Ha! and were you that boy?" demanded the young

cavalier. "I remember you well. You fell into the hands of the free companions with whom I then was, and were sent on safely by them, and by my father's noble cousin, the Lord of Hannut. Mind you the boy who joined you, with good Matthew Gournay, when you were sitting round the freebooters' fire in the forest?"

"Well, perfectly well," replied Albert Maurice.

"Then, that was the son of Adolphus of Gueldres," replied the prisoner, "escaped from the hands of the sworders of the Duke of Burgundy, and flying to seek and find protection and concealment with his father's cousin, the Lord of Hannut. Such was the boy, and I am he."

"Such things are very strange," said Albert Maurice; "and if you knew all that I know, you would say so. Most strange, indeed!" he muttered to himself, "that the bereaved father should become a second parent to the son of him who made him childless. But let your heart rest satisfied!" he added aloud; "your father is well and safe; and you have not even an unconscious crime to reproach yourself with."

He spoke mournfully, and then fell into a deep, long fit of thought, from which he was only roused by the young cavalier demanding whether the noble Lord of Imbercourt had been saved, after all? What were the thoughts at that moment in the bosom of Albert Maurice—whether his mind rested painfully on the consciousness that he could no longer boast of a guiltless heart, and pondered, with all the bitter, wringing agony of crime, upon the blessed sweetness of innocence—can only be guessed; but an involuntary groan burst from the lips of the young citizen at the question of the prisoner, and he clasped his hand upon his eyes. Removing them an instant after, he replied, gazing somewhat sternly upon his companion,—"He died as he deserved."

Hugh of Gueldres replied not; but, feeble as he was, returned the stern glance of Albert Maurice with one still more severe and reproachful. The young citizen recovered himself, however, at once, banished the frown from his brow, and for the moment even stifled the regret within his bosom. "Let us not speak, my lord," he said, "on matters of painful discussion. The man you asked for was tried and condemned by lawful judges, upon what they considered sufficient evidence. He

suffered this morning according to his sentence. Suffice it, that I had no personal hand either in his doom or execution."

"Thank God for that!" said Hugh de Mortmar; "for I do believe that I should look upon even liberty as stained, if received from the hands of one who, for envy or ambition, could do two such noble men to death as died this day in Ghent."

The blood rushed violently up to the face and temples of Albert Maurice; and, for a moment, he felt so giddy, that he started up and leaned against the wall for support. What he had said was true, indeed, to the letter; but conscience told him, that he was not alone an accessary, but a principal in the death of Imbercourt; and, though he had spoken truth, he nevertheless felt that he had deceived. There was again a bitter struggle in his bosom; but it was soon over, for the presence of another person shamed him into conquering the upbraidings of his own heart.

"Let us say no more on that subject, my lord," he rejoined, as soon as he had somewhat recovered his calmness. "It is a matter on which you and I cannot, I fear, agree. I am bound, in justice to the states of Flanders and the magistrates of Ghent, to say boldly that I think they have done nobly, firmly, and well; and though I took no part in the act itself, yet the opinion of no man on earth will make me shrink from avowing that I would have done the same. But all this has nothing to do with the feelings between you and me. Suffice it, that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, which I am ready and willing to pay. You shall be instantly removed from this dungeon to a more convenient chamber, where you shall be tended with all care, till such time as you have recovered strength. If you will, your existence and your situation shall be immediately communicated to the Duke of Gueldres. But still, I think—"

"No, no," answered the prisoner, quickly; "no, no; if there be any other means whatever of obtaining my freedom, without revealing who I am, let me still remain concealed for a certain space. I know not well whether the news of my existence might, or might not, be well received. There are new plans and views abroad, I find, with which my appearance might interfere. My father, I hear, aims at the hand of the heiress of Burgundy."

A scornful smile curled the lip of Albert Maurice, while the other proceeded:—"And I know not how he might love to hear, that a son he has believed to be dead for twenty years had now arisen to cumber his inheritance. Let us pause for a time and see. Nor, indeed, would I willingly be found a prisoner."

"I think you judge rightly, my lord," replied the young citizen; "though the Duke of Gueldres will never marry Mary of Burgundy. But, as to your freedom," he added, cutting short something that the prisoner was about to reply, "for that I will pledge my life; and when once more beyond the walls of Ghent, you can act as you will in regard to discovering yourself."

The motives of Hugh of Gueldres for wishing to conceal his existence from his father for some time longer were certainly those which he had stated; but perhaps he might also be influenced by another feeling. In mingling with men who knew him not for what he was, the name of his father had never reached his ears, but coupled with some opprobrious epithet, or in conjunction with some evil deed; and perhaps a lingering disinclination to claim kindred with such a man might make him still glad to leave his station unacknowledged to the world.

Some further conversation then ensued between the President of Ghent and the son of the Duke of Gueldres; and though Albert Maurice became often thoughtful and abstracted—though there was a varying and uncertain tone in every thing he said, unlike his usual calm and dignified manner; yet, from the nature of the subjects to which they now both restricted themselves, there was something sweet and pleasing in the commune which they indulged. They spoke of the early days in which they had first met—of the times, and the scenes, and the pleasures, and the hopes of other years; and a kindly sympathy, breathing from the past, made for them, even in the prison, and separate as they were by state, by station, by education, and by prejudices, a peculiar atmosphere in which they seemed to live alone. Hugh de Mortmar felt it strongly, and seemed to revive under its influence. His voice became firmer, and his eye regained its light.

"And what," said Albert Maurice, after they had conversed some time on the scenes in the forest of Hannut,

—"and what has become of that good stout soldier, Matthew Gournay, who was, in some sort, a friend of my worthy uncle Martin Fruse?"

"He was with me this day, in Ghent," replied the prisoner; "and I trust in God has escaped beyond the gates. Many a time also has he been the means by which I have communicated to you, through your uncle, those proceedings which I thought it necessary that you should know. Once, not a month since, he was within the walls of Ghent; but could not obtain a private interview with you. Thus it was that you received tidings of the march of the base King of France. Thus, of the coming of his barber ambassador. Thus, too, did I send you a copy of that degraded slave's instructions."

"Then I owe you far more than I ever dreamed of," replied the young citizen, "and I will peril my life but I will repay it. Nevertheless," he added, after a moment's thought, in which suspicions, vague indeed, but strong, of the motives and designs of the druggist Ganay, rose up before his mind; "nevertheless, although for the time I am powerful in the city, yet several days must elapse ere you can mount a horse. I have many enemies, too, many false friends, many dangerous rivals; and I would fain place your security beyond the chance of any thing that may happen to myself. Think you," he added, musing, "that Matthew Gournay, with twenty of his picked companions, would venture once more within the gates of Ghent, and, habited like followers of my own, be ready to aid in your deliverance, whether I be alive or dead?"

"If he have escaped," replied the prisoner, "he would come at my bidding, were it into the jaws of hell. But you must make me certain of his safety, sir citizen."

"That he has escaped, rest assured," replied Albert Maurice; "for no one but yourself was taken: and as for his future security," he added, with a smile, "what object think you I could have in shortening an old man's days?"

A bitter reply rose in the heart of the young cavalier, as he thought of the unhappy Lord of Imbercourt; but he felt it would be ungenerous to give it utterance, and he refrained.

"I trust you, sir!" he replied; "I saved you at a moment when you were an oppressed and injured man; and to doubt you now in such a case would be a kind

of blasphemy against the God who made the human heart. Take this ring, and send it by some sure messenger—a young boy, perchance, were best, though I do not think they would maltreat any one but an open enemy—but send it by some page in a small skiff down the Scheldt at two hours after dusk. The boat will undoubtedly be stopped—and let the page give the ring to Matthew Gournay—whom he will find in the woods between this and Heusden, if he escaped unhurt from Ghent. Let the boy add a message, bidding him, in my name, render himself, with twenty of his comrades, to the house of good Martin Fruse, at any hour that you may appoint. Fear not that he will meet you, and then take counsel with him as you may think fit."

Some more explanations ensued; but as Albert Maurice perceived that the prisoner was exhausted with so long a conversation, he soon after bade him farewell, and left him. "For two days," he said, as he turned to depart, "in all probability, I shall not visit you; for it may be well not to excite any suspicion of my design. But you shall be watched carefully night and day, that no foul practice be employed against you; and at the end of the third day I trust to find you well enough to bear at least a short walk to the river-side. In the mean time, as they have deprived you of your arms, for greater security take this." And he placed in his hands a broad double-edged Venetian poniard, adding,—"Fear not to use it, should any one attempt to injure you; for if they do, the means they employ must be of that kind which does not court examination; and now, once more, farewell!"

The young citizen then retired; and though the more kindly and noble feelings which his conversation with Hugh of Gueldres had awakened—feelings untainted by the world's ambition or its policy—could not, it is true, stifle entirely the cry of remorse; yet there had been a balm in it all, that sent him forth soothed and softened. He retired not to his chamber till he had given orders that care and attendance should be shown to the prisoner, and that he should be removed to a better chamber; but when, at length, he cast himself upon his bed, fatigue, and the feeling that his heart was not all bitterness, brought sleep, though it was disturbed; and he awoke not till the dawn looked in, and roused him from slumber.

Already, when he arose, the first poignancy of regret was gone; and the wound in his heart had grown stiff and numb. The voice of self-love was more ready to plead extenuation; and hope, always far more potent than memory, told him that mighty things might yet be derived for love and for his country, from the very deeds he so deeply regretted. At all events, policy whispered that he must not let the moments slip; and, though the immortal worm, remorse, was yet slowly preying on his heart, he rose prepared to forget the pang, in all the active energy of watchful policy and great ambition.

Even while he was dressing, messenger after messenger, from different parts of the country, bearing news, not alone of the movements of friends and enemies, but also of the preparations which he himself had been labouring to complete, was admitted to his presence. After collecting the tidings that each one bore him, with a minute memory that never failed, and arranging every particular in his own mind with that methodical accuracy which rendered the whole available at a moment's notice, he descended early to the hall—where he expected soon to meet many envious and suspicious visiters—feeling that he possessed a store of ready information on every subject, which he knew must confound and overbear them all. Strange to say—or, perhaps, not strange at all—the state of painful irritation which he now suffered appeared to render all the faculties of his mind more acute and powerful. Naturally energetic, he had acquired a new degree of energy, from the necessity of withdrawing all his thoughts from the past, and fixing them on the present or the future; and his comprehension of the most confused narrative seemed more clear, his orders to the most stupid messenger more precise, than ever they had appeared in the whole course of his public career.

An assembly of all the deputies from Flanders and Brabant had been appointed for that day; but during the morning a number of persons crowded the great hall in a desultory manner, long before any general meeting of the states took place; and among the first that appeared Maillotin du Bac, with an air which expressed both a knowledge that he had overstepped his authority, and a determination to resist every effort to curb his nearly gratified revenge.

At another moment, Albert Maurice might have alone

despised him, and crushed him beneath his feet as a mere worm; but he well knew that great power often trips at a small obstacle. He felt, too, that the height he had reached was a giddy one; and that it might require to stand some time on the dizzy pinnacle of power, in order to acquire that firmness of footing which alone could justify him in despising inferior enemies. His very elevation offended many; and, seeing that the contention must soon commence between himself and the Duke of Gueldres on the one hand, and the Duke of Cleves on the other, he determined to leave the way unencumbered by any minor difficulties. Not that he proposed for a moment to abandon his purpose towards the prisoner he had left the night before; but he resolved to free him by quiet policy, more than by bold and sweeping power.

"Sir prévôt," he said, as soon as their first salutation had passed, "you did wrong, last night, in placing a sentry within the walls of the municipal prison; and also somewhat harshly, in confining an untried prisoner in one of the lower dungeons. Hear me, sir, to an end," he added, seeing the other about to make some dogged reply: "I have no intention of bringing the matter of your boldness before the council, as I might have done; but the thing must not be repeated. Should any like event arise again, I will take care the magistracy of Ghent shall examine strictly what punishment is to be inflicted on those who have frequently dared to infringe their privileges! Mark me, and remember! for I will not pass it over a second time. Now, then, before the states assemble, take one of my officers and visit the prisoner. See whether he is able to undergo examination to-day; and make me your report."

The prévôt was very glad to avoid any collision with the eschevins of Ghent, and at the same time to see a fair prospect of his revenge being accomplished; but as it was far from the wish of Maillotin du Bac that his prisoner should be examined before the states at all, he instantly determined to report him as much too ill to meet the proposed investigation.

At the same time, there was something in the demeanour of the young citizen that surprised him. As men of shrewd but mean minds sometimes are, in their estimation of nobler characters, he was right in his general appreciation of Albert Maurice, and usually per-

ceived the great object that the president was likely to seek in any particular contingency, without, however, at all comprehending the inferior means he would employ to accomplish his purpose. So much the contrary, indeed, that after having judged rightly of the ultimate design, he would often become puzzled and doubtful in regard to the accuracy of his judgment even on that point, because the course pursued by the young citizen was almost always totally different from the method which he himself would have followed in order to arrive at the same object, and totally opposed to all the axioms of his own meaner policy.

Thus, in the present instance, he had sought the town-hall so early, under the perfect conviction that the President of Ghent would attempt to liberate the man who had before given him his freedom; believing, at the same time, that the consciousness of such a purpose would cause the aspiring citizen to avoid the subject, or to speak darkly upon his own views. But the bold and proud manner in which Albert Maurice rebuked his assumption of power in the town prison, and spoke of the immediate examination of the prisoner, shook his conviction, and almost made him believe that the same stern and uncompromising policy, which had been pursued towards Hugonet and Imbercourt, would be followed throughout, without regard to any other feeling than selfish ambition.

The scenes which he soon witnessed tended to confirm this opinion; and led him, however falsely, to believe that Albert Maurice forgot every gentler and nobler feeling, every generous tie and private affection, in the overpowering impulse of an aspiring heart. Scarcely had the order proceeded from the lips of the young citizen to inspect the condition of the prisoner, ere two or three members of the states entered the hall. Several others followed within a very short interval; and as soon as Albert Maurice perceived that a sufficient number were assembled to justify the discussion of important matters, he declared the appointed hour fully arrived, called them to consultation, and at once boldly proposed that a decree of banishment,—drawn up in the name of the states general of Flanders, though not ten members of that body were present, and those wholly devoted to his own views—should be issued against the Lord of Ravestein and the Dowager-duchess of Burgundy, as

parties to the plot for subjecting the country to the sway of France.

So bold a measure was not, of course, without an object of deep moment to him who proposed it; but when it is remembered, that Ravestein and Margaret of York were the only influential persons who now remained with the princess, of what was called in Ghent the French party,—the only party that Albert Maurice feared,—his motives will be clear enough. The Duke of Gueldres, though dangerous from the popularity he had suddenly acquired, the young citizen thought himself strong enough to overthrow when he liked, supported by the Duke of Cleves, and by the manifest abhorrence which the princess displayed towards that prince; and the Duke of Cleves himself, the president felt sure, was too weak to succeed without his aid. Thus the French alliance was the only proposal that he really dreaded; but still, the measure he counselled was too bold to pass without some debate.

It was carried, however, at length, before any one arrived who had sufficient influence to oppose it with vigour; and the order for the instant removal of the dowager-duchess and the Lord of Ravestein was sent at once to the palace, enforced by a large body of the burgher guard.

Gradually the assembly increased, till about forty persons were gathered round the council-table, while a number of others, unentitled to a seat among the deliberative body, filled the vacant places of the hall, by the favour of the president's adherents. He himself was, perhaps, not unaware that a multitude of voices, ready to applaud his views, were collected around him; for the noblest,—ay, and the proudest heart will bend servilely to the senseless shout it despises, when once it has bound itself as a serf in the golden collar of ambition. Albert Maurice at length, after casting his eye around to see who were the members of the states assembled, rose to speak; but at the moment that he did so, the trampling of horse coming at a rapid rate, and loud shouts of "Long live the Duke of Gueldres! Health to the noble duke and the fair princess! Long life to Ghent and the Duke of Gueldres!" were heard rising from the square below; and the young citizen again sat down, with a contracted brow and quivering lip.

In a few moments the Duke of Gueldres entered the hall, and took his seat on the right of the president, who knew the informal constitution of their whole assembly too well to object to that noble's intrusion on their councils. Albert Maurice rose again immediately himself, however, and at once addressed the states, as they termed themselves, in a speech full of fire and energy. He pointed out that the time was now come when active and combined exertion throughout the whole land was necessary to save it from the usurpation of France—when not only the safety, but the very existence, of the country required the energy of every individual to be employed, without a moment's delay, for the benefit of the whole; and he touched eloquently upon the necessity of laying aside all private jealousies, disputes, and feuds, in order to concentrate all efforts to check the rapid progress of the French monarch. "Of many dangers," he said, "it was of course necessary to meet that which was most imminent, and no one would doubt for a moment, that the usurping and successful arms of France presented the peril they had most to dread. Severe measures had been pursued," he said, "to show the timid and the traitor that they could not betray their country with impunity; and it became the states of Flanders and Brabant, even as a consequence of many of their late acts, to prove to their countrymen that they could and would protect the honest and the patriotic, as well as punish the guilty and the disloyal. It was time," he added, "to lay aside all differences of opinion, to forget individual interests and passions, to cast away every thought but patriotism, and calling forth the whole intelligence and the whole strength of the state, to join heart and hand, and mind and energy in defence of their violated rights and their insulted country."

He spoke with the most powerful oratory, and he spoke true; but he did not remember that the oil of smooth words will never allay the raging waves of faction, even though the storm of anarchy threaten to wreck the state itself. Had he looked into his own heart, indeed, and seen that, though he was now anxious to repel the common enemy, yet it was but in order to seize one quiet moment to overthrow his political rivals, he would have learned the secret of every bosom around him, and found that selfish ambition was the whole.

In the midst of his speech, however, while, in the very vehemence of declamation, he was inveighing against France, and was about to proceed from the general terms which he had been using, to a clear and minute view of the state of the land, and the measures immediately necessary for its defence, one of the deputies from some inferior town, who believed the moment for distinguishing his own small knowledge and talents was arrived, rose, and boldly cut across the president's speech, exclaiming, "Perhaps the noble president does not know the unhappy news—"

"I know all!" thundered Albert Maurice, his eyes lightening with indignation at the interruption. "God of heaven! wherefore do I hold the station that I do, if it be not to learn, and know, and investigate all that may concern the interest of the state? Do I not know that Arras has fallen? that Tournay is in the hands of the enemy? that Hesdin, and Boulogne, and Bethune are taken? that Oudard has been murdered? that Descordes is false? that Vergy lies in chains? Do I not know that the duchy of Burgundy is invaded; that Franche-compté is overrun; and that the troops of Louis are advancing to the gates of Ghent? What is it that I do not know, that any one should dare to interrupt me? Let me tell the deputy who has just sat down, that, if he had all the miserable catalogue of the woes and dangers of his country, from the first infraction of her frontiers, to the last base, or mean, or murderous act of her great enemy, so much by heart as I have, he would turn every thought of his mind to find means of meeting the perils that menace us, rather than interrupt the order of this assembly by speaking before he has heard."

The vehemence with which the young citizen spoke, the picture of overwhelming misfortunes which he displayed, and the deep tone of patriotic anxiety which his words breathed forth, combined to make his hearers forget the angry bitterness with which he rebuked one of their members, and each turned and gazed, with an expression of terror, in the faces of the others, as the president counted over the rapid losses and misfortunes of their country.

Albert Maurice paused, and Ganay, who was present, remarked, without rising, "Something must be immediately done to remedy all this. Or, doubtless," he added,

not unwilling to bring about some imputation of blame upon Albert Maurice for neglect, though unwilling to utter one word of blame himself, "or, doubtless, our noble president has already, with his usual activity, prepared some means of meeting all these difficulties."

"I have!" replied Albert Maurice, sternly; and as he did so, a slight curl of the lip conveyed to the druggist a suspicion that his purpose had been understood. "I have! The difficulty can only be met, the enemy can only be opposed in arms, and the means have been prepared. Seven thousand men have been raised and trained in Ghent, as you all know. Three thousand men are ready to march in the villages round about. Before noon, five thousand more will be in the city from Ypres, and, ere night, five thousand more will have arrived from Bruges; while Brabant and the other provinces are preparing an army of forty thousand men besides. Our power is thus already sufficient to keep the towns of Flanders against the King of France, while forces are marching up to our aid, which will soon enable us to expel him from our land for ever. Provisions for forty days have been prepared, and a magazine of arms is already established at Oudenarde, which is garrisoned by a sufficient force to ensure it from capture. We have still a line of fortified places, which we can soon render secure; and having done so, we can bid the tyrant either retire from our borders, or let his soldiers rot in the field till we reap them with the sword, instead of that harvest which they have mowed ere it was ripe."

A loud and long burst of applause followed this recapitulation of the means which, by the most extraordinary activity, he had collected in so short a space of time to repel the arms of France; and, satisfied with the impression that he had made, Albert Maurice sat down, in order to allow one of the deputies from Ypres to propose a plan of action, which had been laid down between them before, for the employment of the forces thus raised to the general advantage of Flanders. The worthy burgher, however, though a man of sense, and some military skill, having served during a considerable time with the people of his commune under the Duke Philip, was always an unwilling speaker, and paused for a moment to collect his ideas after the president had sat down.

The Duke of Gueldres instantly seized the occasion, and, anxious to gain the command of the army, proposed to lead it himself against the suburbs of Tournay, together with five hundred men-at-arms which he had raised since his liberation. "The very appearance of such a force in the field," he said, "and led on to some rapid and brilliant expedition, would make Louis XI., who had been well called *Le Roi Couard*, pause and hesitate, while fresh reinforcements might come up to swell the army of Flanders, and enable it either to risk a general battle, or attempt the recapture of the towns which had been taken."

To this proposal Albert Maurice strongly objected, and declared that, instead of encountering any further risk than that inevitable in leading a raw and inexperienced army through a difficult country, they ought to make it their chief object to strengthen the garrisons of all the many fortified towns they still possessed, but more especially to throw a considerable force into Lille and Douai, which still held out for the princess, and were plentifully supplied with provisions, but whose respective garrisons were too small to retard the progress of Louis for three days, whenever he should lead his armies against them. In support of this opinion, he showed that troops hastily levied, and unaccustomed to warfare, were much more likely to serve well when defended by stone walls, and commanded by experienced officers, than in the open field against a veteran army. He showed, also, that Tournay itself was not likely long to hold out for France, if Lille and Douai were properly garrisoned with numbers sufficient to sweep the whole neighbouring country of provisions; and he ended by calling upon the states not to be dazzled by the apparent ease of the enterprise proposed by the Duke of Gueldres, for he could assure them that it was the best maxim, both in tactics and policy, never to believe any thing impossible, but never to fancy any thing easy.

The countenance of the Duke of Gueldres flushed with wrath, to hear himself so boldly opposed by a simple citizen of Ghent, and he was about to reply with hasty vehemence, which would infallibly have ruined all his own designs, had not Ganay started up, and, with all the smooth and plausible art of which he was master, sketched out a plan, which, while it seemed to coincide

with that of Albert Maurice, rendered it nearly nugatory, and, at the same time, coincided exactly with that of the Duke of Gueldres.

"The infinite wisdom and skill," he said, "which have been displayed, under all circumstances, by our noble president, should make us receive his opinion with reverence and respect, were it not even evidently founded in knowledge and experience. There can be no doubt, however, in the minds of any one here present, that the preservation of Lille and Douai is absolutely necessary for the security of Flanders, and may also greatly tend to facilitate the very objects proposed by the noble Duke of Gueldres. But the two plans are by no means incompatible. Neither Lille nor Douai can admit of a garrison of more than two thousand men in addition to that with which they are at present furnished. Twelve or thirteen thousand men will be quite sufficient to enable the noble duke to make his attempt upon Tournay. Let then the president himself, whose military skill we all witnessed, when he served with the men of Ghent under the late Duke Charles, some five or six years ago,—let him then lead five thousand men to the aid of Lille and Douai; and, having thrown what force into those places he may find necessary, return with the rest to Ghent; while, in the mean time, the duke marches forth against Tournay with the rest of the force which we can spare from the defence of this city."

The feelings which this speech excited in the mind of Albert Maurice were of a very mixed and intricate nature. By this time, from many of those slight and accidental indications by which a skilful observer may read the changes of the human heart, the young burgher had learned that Ganay was no longer the zealous friend he had been, and he felt, rather than remarked, that, with that dark and subtle being there could be no medium between active support and deadly opposition, circumstanced as they were and had been. With this conviction pressed upon his mind, perhaps he might see, or at least suspect, that one object in the proposal of the druggist was to obtain his absence from the city. He might see, too, that the command of a large portion of the army given to the Duke of Gueldres, whose military abilities were well known, would throw immense power into the hands of that prince, becoming already too powerful; and he likewise knew the gen-

eral dangers attendant upon the absence of a political leader too well, not to dread the consequences of his own absence at a moment so critical. Nevertheless, one of his chief weaknesses was the ambition of military renown; and that ambition had received an impulse which it had never known before, since he had dared to raise his hopes to a princess descended from a race of heroes. He felt, too, within himself, great powers of the kind immediately required, and he trusted that, by the exertion of that energetic activity which characterized all his movements, he should be enabled to accomplish his enterprise,—to add, perhaps, some brilliant exploits to all that he had already performed, and to return to Ghent before any great advantage could be taken of his absence by his enemies. An immediate reply, however, was necessary, and long discussions ensued, in the course of which Albert Maurice did not absolutely oppose the scheme of Ganay; yet there were in the details so many nice and delicate points to be determined, that much angry and vehement dispute took place, in which the violent and overbearing temper of the Duke of Gueldres more than once broke forth, and was repressed by the young citizen, in his capacity of president of the states, with a stern severity, that left them both, with flushed cheeks and frowning brows, gazing upon each other when the meeting of the states broke up. By this time, however, all was determined. Albert Maurice had accepted the command, with the understanding that it was totally distinct and independent of the one conferred upon the Duke of Gueldres, that the troops were solely under his own orders, and that the moment he had performed the specific task he undertook, he was at liberty to return to Ghent. All this had been conceded. The populace quitted the hall, and the deputies, one by one, took their leave and retired. The Duke of Gueldres was among the last that left the apartment, and it was with a slow step he descended the stairs nearly to the bottom, biting his lip with ill-repressed passion at the contradiction he had met with, and at the little reverence that the President of Ghent had shown either to his opinions or to his rank. His meditations did not serve to cool him; on the contrary, at every step the words which had been addressed to him, and the scene in which they had been spoken, recurred with more and more bitterness to his mind, and

when he had reached the last step but two, passion, as it often did with him, got the better of all command, and stamping on the ground with his foot, as he remembered the contemptuous curl of the young citizen's lip, he turned, and mounting the stairs with wide strides, once more entered the hall.

Albert Maurice was standing alone at the head of the table, with a countenance of deep melancholy, from which every expression of anger and scorn was now totally banished. He raised his eyes as the duke entered, and gazed upon him with surprise, as, advancing close to him, with flashing eyes and a burning cheek, that rude prince exclaimed, "You have dared, sir,—villain and slave as you are, base mechanical hind, bred and born among looms and shuttles,—you have dared to treat with disrepect a noble of the land, and, by heaven, you shall some day pay for it. Were you not as the dirt beneath my feet, and would not your vile blood sully my sword to shed it, I would save the hangman the pains he may some day have, and punish you where you stand."

"Know, Duke of Gueldres," replied Albert Maurice, with calm sternness,—though in other days he might have laughed at the intemperate insolence of his adversary,—"know, Duke of Gueldres, that were there any thing in the empty assumption of blood, mine is descended from as pure a stock as your own, though one of my ancestors wisely and nobly chose to embrace an honourable trade, rather than follow the example of such as you and yours, and live by rapine, plunder, oppression, and wrong. Advance not your hand towards me, sir duke; for remember that insult levels all distinctions; and that I, too, wear a sword, which I should not scruple to die in nobler blood than that of the Duke of Gueldres, if he laid but a finger upon me."

"Out, slave!" cried the duke; "I will take thy boasted descent on credit, were it but to punish thine insolence;" and striking the young citizen a violent blow on the breast, he threw back his mantle and drew his sword.

Albert Maurice was not slack to meet him, and his sword was also in his hand, when a number of the citizens who had heard, through the open doors, the high words which had lately passed, ran in and beat up their weapons. The Duke of Gueldres glared round him for a moment in vain fury, then thrust back his sword into its scab-

bard, and shaking his clenched hand towards the young citizen, exclaimed, "When next we meet!" and, turning on his heel, left the apartment.

Albert Maurice sheathed his weapon also, and only commenting on what had passed by a contemptuous smile, resumed his look of grave thought, and proceeded calmly to transact the business of his station.

CHAPTER XII.

The Duke of Gueldres, however, was still to enjoy a triumph before he returned to his dwelling, which, could he have seen into the heart of his rival, would have fully compensated all the pain which his anger had inflicted on himself. Albert Maurice was left alone; but there was a shout in the market-place without, which rang painfully on his ears, as he turned from the great hall; for he could not avoid hearing the loud voice of the multitude, cheering the Duke of Gueldres as he mounted his horse. The sounds were distinct enough; and bitter enough, also! They were, "Long live the Duke of Gueldres and the princess! Gueldres and Burgundy for ever! We will give her to whom we like! She shall marry the good duke! Long life to the noble Duke of Gueldres!" and though, as that prince rode on, the words were no longer to be distinguished, the cries still continued, and the fancy of the young citizen furnished each brawling shout with articulate words of the character most inimical to his own peace.

"Ere I go," he thought,—"ere I go, I will see her myself; and assure myself of her feelings before I quit the city. Then, if I find that she hates him, as I believe—that she looks upon him as the wolf he really is, I will take sufficient means to guard her from his importunities during my absence."

The determination was no sooner formed than he prepared to execute it; and while he despatched a messenger to the palace to demand an audience of the princess previous to his departure, which was fixed for the next day, he gave a multitude of necessary orders, and as soon as his horse was ready, set out himself to

seek an interview, which the consciousness of having brought about the death of Mary's counsellors, and the banishment of her friends, made him dread even while he courted it.

But, as those who are young in deceit generally do, he forgot, for the time, that the dark secrets of his heart were confined to his own bosom; and that the policy he had pursued, and the bold ambition that prompted it, were unknown to her who had most suffered by it. In truth, the feelings of Mary were very different from those which he had anticipated. The broad and simple facts only had reached her ear. She knew that the young citizen had taken no part in the trial or the judgment of Imbercourt, and that he had not even been present at his execution. The order for the immediate removal of the duchess-dowager and Ravestein, also, had been issued in the name of the states: and perfectly unconscious of the wild hopes and ambitious dreams of Albert Maurice, she believed that if he had at all mingled in those proceedings, it was but most unwillingly, and from a strong, though mistaken, impression of duty and patriotism. Deprived, too, of the counsellors in whom she had always most trusted, and of the friends whom she had most loved, the unhappy girl felt inclined to cling to any one who seemed disposed to treat her with kindness and tenderness; and the only one who now remained was Albert Maurice. He had always been gentle; he had always seemed to advocate her interest; he had never asked her for gift, or honour, or dignity; and even his very animosity towards Imbercourt and the chancellor had first arisen in the support which he gave to the princess in her reluctant struggles against the hard and painful policy her ministers had dictated. The dignity of his demeanour, the high qualities of his mind, the independence of his character, and the apparent disinterestedness of his conduct had gained her esteem; and the respectful gentleness of his manners towards herself, as well as his constant and zealous advocacy, in the council, of the line of policy dictated by her wishes as a woman, had won her gratitude and her confidence.

A gleam of pleasure brightened the gloom around her when she heard that he was coming; and, in order at once to attach him more strongly to her interests, to express her thanks for his supposed services, and to

detach him totally from the burgher faction, whose influence had already worked so much evil, she directed one of the officers of the palace to draw up, immediately, letters of nobility in favour of the young citizen, and to bring them to her with all speed. Gentle by nature and by habit, the only arms which Mary ever employed against her rebellious subjects were favours and mildness, and she fondly fancied, that, in this step towards Albert Maurice, she had devised a deep stroke of policy. The secretary's task was almost completed when Albert Maurice arrived; and the evident pleasure with which Mary received him, in the midst of all her griefs, extinguished for the time remorse and apprehension in the blaze of hope and joy, and once more nerved him for the bold career of ambition in which he had started against such fearful odds.

The princess was pale and shaken with all the agitation, terror, and grief of the day before; but the light that shone up in her eyes, and the smile which played about her lips as he approached, made her appear a thousand times more lovely in the eyes of the young burgher than she would have seemed in all the pride of state, security, and happiness. In the unconscious simplicity of her heart, too, all her words gave encouragement to feelings that she little dreamed of; and when, on the announcement of his approaching departure, she pressed him to stay, and to abandon his design; when she assured him that he was the only one in whom she could now trust, since her faithful servants had been put to death and her kindred had been banished, and beseeched him not to leave her without a counsellor, or without a friend, Albert Maurice, knowing the passions that animated his own bosom, could not but hope that in some degree she saw them too; and—while habitual respect cast a deep reverence over all his words and actions, which served to deceive her as to his feelings—his love and his ambition caught a new fire from the confiding esteem she expressed towards him. He assured her that in six days he would be once more in Ghent; and he hoped, he said, to lay some laurels at her feet. In the mean time, he added, it might be necessary to think of her security against all intrusion.

"Oh, for the love of heaven, provide for that!" exclaimed the princess; "I fear that base, that dreadful Duke of Gueldres. Even the shelter of my own apart-

ments is no security against him; and his influence with the people, they tell me, is becoming fearfully great. Speak, Margaret," she added, turning to one of her attendants, "what was it you heard the people crying but now?"

"Fear not, your grace," replied Albert Maurice, without waiting to hear from the princess's lady a repetition of words which had already made his blood boil. "Fear not, your grace! The career of the Duke of Gueldres draws towards its end! If I judge rightly, his own ambition will be a stumbling-block sufficient to bring his speedy overthrow. But if not—sooner than you should suffer from his insolent daring, he shall find that Albert Maurice does not wear a sword in vain."

"Oh, use it not against him, sir," replied the princess; "there may be other ways of ridding the city of his presence. Too much blood has been shed already; nay, do not look sad, lord president. I know that it was without your will. I know that you were not even present. But while you are absent from the city,—if your absence be unavoidable,—I beseech you to take measures to guard me against his intrusion. When you return," she added, with a deep crimson blush, which rose from feelings that would have damned all the young citizen's presumptuous hopes for ever, could he have divined them—"when you return, I would fain speak with you on taking such measures for the defence of the state as may obtain for it permanent security. A woman's hand, I see, cannot hold the reins of such a land as that which I am unhappily called to govern; and it is time for me to yield them to some one who can better guide the state than I can. But more of this hereafter. We will not speak more now."

The heart of the young citizen throbbed as if it would have burst,—but it throbbed with joy; and probably he might have replied, notwithstanding the prohibition of the princess, in such a manner as would have ended the delusion of both; but, at that moment, according to the orders he had received, the secretary of the chancery of Burgundy brought in the letters-patent, which he had been drawing up in haste.

The princess presented them to him for whom they were destined with her own hand, leaving him at liberty to make them public, or to preserve them unemployed till such time as he should think fit: and while she gave

them, she added her thanks for his obedience to the wishes she had expressed when last they met. Though the subject was too painful for the princess even to mention the name of the two faithful servants she had lost, yet Albert Maurice felt that she alluded to her petitions in their behalf. For a single instant he thought she spoke in irony, and his cheek turned red and pale by turns; but a moment's reflection called to his mind the simple, candid character of her who spoke, and what she had before said on the same subject; and he saw that she deceived herself in regard to the part he had taken. There was a natural rectitude in his heart which might have made him, at any risk, avow boldly his approval of, if not his participation in, the bloodshed which had been committed—had the love of Mary of Burgundy not been at stake. But he who knew not what fear is, under other circumstances, had learned to become as timid as a child in her presence; and though, while kneeling to kiss her hand in thanks for the honour she had just conferred, his whole frame trembled both with the agitation of deep love, and the knowledge that he was acting a deceitful part, yet he found it impossible to utter those words which he well knew would have pronounced his own condemnation to the ears of Mary of Burgundy.

The sensation, however, oppressed him; and, after hurried and somewhat incoherent thanks, he took his leave and retired, feeling that he had made another step in the crooked and degrading path of policy.

The rest of the day was consumed in preparations for his departure early the next morning, and in precautions against the influence of his enemies in Ghent. Men may make use of knaves and hypocrites, in order to rise, but they must still have recourse to the honest and the true, when they would give permanence to their authority. Thus, from the council which Albert Maurice now called to his aid Ganay was excluded, as well as all the fiercer and more subtle spirits which had hitherto been so busy in the affairs of Ghent; while honest Martin Fruse, and seven other citizens like himself, who, though not without their weaknesses and their follies, possessed at heart a fund of honesty of intent and plain common sense, were summoned by the young citizen to a private conference, for the purpose of taking such measures as would secure the peace and tranquillity

of the city, and the stability of the order of things established, during his temporary absence.

He felt it difficult, indeed, to explain to them all the evils that were to be guarded against, all the dangers that he foresaw, and all the apprehensions that he entertained, especially in regard to the druggist Ganay. To have done so fully would have been to expose all the darker and more dangerous secrets of his own bosom, and to give a picture of himself, of the means he had employed, and of the deeds into which he had been betrayed, which he was unwilling to display to any human being: and it was not without much circumlocution that he could find words to convey his immediate views to the honest men by whom he was surrounded, and yet keep to those general terms which might not expose himself.

Martin Fruse, however, whose love for his nephew was paramount in his bosom, greatly relieved the task; for—with a sort of intuitive feeling, that there were many things which Albert Maurice would wish to keep concealed, and from a desire of sparing him as much as possible—he passed as rapidly as his intellect would permit him to conclusions, skipping as quickly as possible over all explanations regarding preceding facts, with a nod or smile of intelligence, which led the other worthy merchants to believe that he was fully acquainted with all the machinery of the events which had taken place. After some hours' consultation, it was arranged that Albert Maurice, deputing his whole municipal authority to his uncle, should intrust the worthy citizen and the other merchants present, to form such a party in the council, as might keep the whole affairs of the town, if possible, in a completely passive state during his absence. His office in the states general he could not, of course, transfer; for though he held the presidency of that body as a privilege connected with its assembling in the city of which he had been constituted chief magistrate, yet that privilege could not be deputed to another; and the states—if they met at all during his absence—would be presided by the next deputy from the city of Ghent.

The power, however, which he placed in the hands of good Martin Fruse was any thing but insignificant, for Ghent then ruled the states; and it was determined that all measures were to be taken for the security of

the city and the repairs of the fortifications, that the purchase of supplies and provisions, and the levying of men, were to go on as usual; but upon the proposal of any important movement, on the part of Ghent, a motion for its postponement till the return of the president was immediately to be put, and supported by his friends. The meeting of the states general, too, was to be opposed as much as possible during his absence from Ghent; and as the authority of the municipality of Ghent was, of course, paramount in their own city, it seemed probable that his friends would be able to exert great influence in this respect. Any pretensions of the Duke of Gueldres to the hand of the princess were to be strenuously opposed in the council; and Martin Fruse, with the burgher guard, were to give her every support and protection, in case she might require it. Anxious, too, for the safety of Hugh of Gueldres, Albert Maurice took care that a strong guard should be stationed over the town-prison, and that the merchants should be prepared to put an instant negative upon any proposal for bringing the prisoner to trial during his absence.

When all these arrangements were concluded, the next care of the young citizen was to select such bands from among both the new and old levies of the city as were most likely to ensure him success in the enterprises which he proposed; and this being done, and all his further preparations completed, he proceeded once more to visit the Vert Gallant of Hannut in the chamber to which he had now been removed. The young cavalier lay in a deep, sweet sleep, from which even the opening of the door and the approach of Albert Maurice did not wake him; and the young citizen gazed for a moment or two on his face,—as he lay so calm and tranquil, within the walls of a prison, and exposed to constant danger—with a feeling of envy and regret, which, perhaps, few can appreciate fully who have not felt the sharp tooth of remorse begin its sleepless gnawing on the heart.

He would not have disturbed such slumbers for the world; and, withdrawing again with a noiseless step, he retired to his own chamber, and cast himself down upon his bed, to snatch, at least, that heated and disturbed sleep which was all the repose that he was ever more to know on earth.

CHAPTER XIII.

The clang of trumpets echoing through the streets of Ghent, an hour before daybreak, announced that the body of forces under the command of the young president was about to set out upon its expedition; and as the burghers started from their sleep, and listened to the various sounds that followed—the trampling of horses, the voices of the officers, and the dull measured tread of marching men—there was not unfrequently a feeling of pride rose in their bosoms from that universal principle—"the extension of the idea of self;" as each one felt that the army thus on its march was, in some degree, his own, as part and parcel of the city of Ghent.

To the ears of none in the whole town, however, did those sounds come more pleasantly than to those of the druggist Ganay, who had felt, within the last two days, a sort of thirst to see the back of him he had once loved turned upon the city; for though—with that degree of pride in his cunning which artful men often possess—he did not usually apprehend that his wit would fail in a struggle with that of any other being; yet there was something in the unaccountable knowledge of foregone facts which Albert Maurice had displayed, that made him entertain a vague fear of the young citizen, and rendered him unwilling to venture any very bold stroke till Ghent was free from his presence.

The first sound of the trumpet fell upon his ear as he sat watching the bed of the wounded Lord of Neufchatel, into whose sick chamber he had obtruded himself with an officious zeal, which might have been resented by the noble's attendants, had he not, by quiet and soothing attentions, rendered himself useful, and his presence pleasing to the invalid himself, while a long attendance on a sick and fretful old man had cooled and wearied those who were at first most active in his service. A restless and feverish night had passed away; and as morning came, the ancient seneschal of

Burgundy showed some inclination to fall asleep; but the first braying of the trumpets roused him, and he eagerly demanded what those sounds meant. The druggist explained the cause at once; and the enfeebled warrior shook his head with a melancholy air, as he heard the call to horse sounded again, without being able to raise a limb from his couch.

"'Twas not so when first you knew me, Master Ganay!" he said; and then—while one sound succeeded another, and squadron after squadron marched forth through the streets—he continued to murmur a number of low and somewhat incoherent sentences, between the delirium of feverish irritation and the drowsiness of exhaustion. At length, as a faint bluish light began to gleam into the chamber from the dawning of the morning, the last horseman passed before the gates of the court-yard, and all in Ghent resumed its former stillness.

The old man would then have addressed himself to sleep again, but Ganay now recalled his mind to the subject of his brighter days, with an extraordinary degree of pertinacity. "Nay, nay, my noble lord," he said, returning to the topic of their early acquaintance; "when first I saw your lordship, you would little have suffered an army to march, while you lay still in bed!"

"Not I—not I, indeed!" replied the Lord of Neufchatel. "But what can one do?"

"Alack, nothing now," answered the druggist; "but think that you never flinched while you could keep the saddle. You were as eager a rider in those days as ever I met—ay! and somewhat hasty withal."

"Ah! my good Ganay, are you there now?" said the old lord. "Have you not forgot that yet? Well, man, I did you wrong; but have I not tried to make atonement? I did you wrong, I do believe from my soul."

"Believe, my lord!" cried Ganay; "are you not sure? Are not the very papers you possess convincing enough of my innocence?"

"Well, well, perhaps they are," replied the old man, somewhat impatiently.

"Perhaps they are!" exclaimed the other. "Nay, surely they are. But let me fetch and read them to your lordship—where can I find them?"

"They are in the Venice cabinet, I think," answered the Lord of Neufchatel; "but never mind them—never

mind them! I tell thee I am convinced—what need of more? I would fain sleep now, if the accursed itching of this thrust in my shoulder would let me. Call the boy with his rote, good Ganay! he often puts me to sleep by playing on his instrument—or the man that tells stories: he is better still. I never fail to grow drowsy as soon as he begins, and to snore before he has half done."

"Take but a cup of this elixir, my lord," answered the druggist. "Mind you not how it refreshed you yesterday morning?"

"Surely!" cried the old lord, in a peevish tone. "Have you any more? Why did you not give it me sooner? How could you see me suffer so all night, and not give me that which alone eases me?"

"Because, if used too often, it loses its effect," replied the druggist.

"Give it me—give it me now, then," cried the invalid impatiently. "When would you give a man medicine but when he is ill and in pain? Spare not, man—let the dose be full. Thou shalt be well paid for thy drugs."

Ganay took up a cup from the table, and nearly filled it with a dark-coloured liquid from a phial which he drew out of his bosom. He then gave it to the old noble, who drank off the contents at once, while the druggist gazed on him with an eye which seemed almost starting from its sockets, so intense was the look of eager interest with which he regarded him.

"Are you sure it is the same?" said the Lord of Neufchatel, returning the cup,—"it tastes differently; —it is bitterer, and has a faint taste as of earth. It is —it is—not so—"

But, as he spoke, the lids of his eyes fell—he opened them drowsily once or twice—added a few more almost inarticulate words, and then sank back upon his pillow Ganay looked at him intently for two or three minutes; then stole out of the room; and, descending with a quiet step to the hall, he woke his own serving-boy, who was sitting by the fire—"Hie thee to the prévôt," he whispered; "bid him hither instantly!"

"Who goes there?" cried the servant on watch, who had been asleep also, but was now wakened by the boy opening the door,—"who goes there?"

"Only my boy," answered Ganay, "going for some

drugs against my good lord wakes,—I would have healed him sooner than all the leeches in the town, had I but tried it before; but, of course, I could not meddle till he dismissed the surgeon in such wrath."

"How goes he now, Master Ganay?" demanded the man.

"Better, I hope!" replied the druggist; "but he has had a fearful night. He now sleeps, and I think it is a crisis. If he wake better, he will do well. If not, he dies."

"God forefend!" cried the man.

Ganay echoed loudly the wish, and retired once more to the sick man's chamber.

Entering with stealthy steps, he approached the bed, and gazed upon him that it contained. A slight stream of dark fluid had flowed from his mouth, and stained his pillow; and Ganay, as he remarked this appearance, muttered, "The stomach has rejected it! He must take more. To leave it half-done were worse than all! Here, my lord!" he added aloud, shaking him by the arm—"here, take a little more of the same blessed elixir!"

But the old man made no answer, except by a long deep-drawn sigh; and Ganay, adding, "He has had enough," sat down, and turning his face from the lamp, continued gazing for some minutes upon the couch. From time to time, as he sat and looked, a few muttered words would escape his lips; and often he would turn and listen for the sounds in the street, as if impatient for the coming of some one from without.

"The Venice cabinet!" he muttered, "that stands in the small arras chamber by the saloon!—Could one reach it, now, unperceived! But no. 'Tis better to wait till Du Bac arrives—some of the varlets might catch me, and all were ruined—Better wait till he comes—He is very tedious, though—It works but slowly! He has had hardly enough—What can be done? He cannot take any more!—that is a long-drawn sigh,—it should be the last. A little help were not amiss, though!" and so saying, he pressed his hand heavily on the chest of the old Lord of Neufchatel. It rose once slightly against the weight; but death and life were by this time so nearly balanced in his frame, that it rose but once, and then all was quiet. Still Ganay continued the pressure with his whole force, till suddenly the eyes opened, and the jaw

dropped; and the murderer instinctively started back, fancying that his victim was awaking from his slumber. But he instantly perceived that what he saw was but the sign of a longer and more profound sleep having taken the old man to repôse for ever; and, after one more glance to satisfy himself that no means of resuscitation could prove available, he loudly called upon the servants and attendants to give him help, for that their lord was dying. It was some time before he made them hear; for the illness of the old noble, as we have before said, had been long and tedious, and kindness had been wearied, and attention worn out. When they did come, therefore, the druggist had some excuse to rate them severely for inattention and sloth. He affected to try many means of recalling the dead to life again; and proposed to send for skilful leeches, as soon as he heard the voice of Maillotin du Bac in the hall below.

That officer now came boldly in, and, stopping all other proceedings, demanded whether any relation of the dead lord were in the house. The answer, as he knew it must be, was in the negative; for—as the servants replied—all his connexions were in the far parts of Burgundy. "Well, then," cried the prévôt,—"it becomes me, though not exactly the proper officer, to seal up all the doors and effects of the deceased, till such time as account can be taken. You, my men," he continued, to the archers of the band that followed him, "gather all these worthy servants and varlets together in the great hall, and see that no one stirs a step, till I have asked them a question or two. You, Master Ganay, being one of the magistrates of the town, had better come with me, to bear witness that I seal all things fairly. You, my good lieutenant, bring me some wax and a chafing-dish, and then return to the hall, to guard these worthy fellows till I come."

The domestic attendants of the old lord, among whom were several of his ancient military retainers, grumbled not a little at this arrangement, and might have shown somewhat more stubborn resistance, had not the force brought by the prévôt overmatched them in numbers as well as in preparations. One of them, however, whispered to a boy who was among them, to slip out and warn the other retainers in the lodging over the way; the house, or rather houses, of the deceased noble, extending, as was not uncommon in those times,

to both sides of the street. With this intimation to the boy, and one or two loud oaths, which the prévôt would not hear, the servants were removed, and the two accomplices stood together in the dead man's chamber alone. Such sights were too familiar to Maillotin du Bac to cause even the slightest feeling of awe to cross his bosom, as he gazed on the face of the corpse; and after looking at it for a moment in silence, he turned to the druggist with a well-satisfied smile, but without further comment.

"Let us make haste!" cried Ganay,—"the papers are in the Venice cabinet, in the little arras chamber by the saloon."

"Wait for the wax! Wait for the wax, man!" replied the prévôt; "there is plenty of time. Let us do things orderly. You seek for the keys in the mean time. They are in that cupboard, probably. Where is the key of it? But never mind,—I will put back the lock with my dagger."

This was soon accomplished, and the open door exposed, as the prévôt had expected, several large bunches of keys, and a leathern bag, which bore all the marks of being swelled out with coined pieces of some kind. The druggist seized upon the keys, and carefully concealed them on his person; but the prévôt dipped his hand zealously into the heart of the leathern bag,—drawing it forth, and then plunging it deep into his own bosom, without at all examining what his fist contained. After two or three such dives down into the pouch, which grew somewhat lank and wrinkled under its intercourse with the prévôt's hand, he raised it, as if to see how much it still contained, murmuring—"We must leave some!"

An approaching step now caused him to replace it hastily, and close the door; and, as soon as the lieutenant brought him the wax and chafing-dish he had been despatched to seek, Maillotin du Bac proceeded to secure that cupboard first, using the hilt of his dagger as a seal.

The inferior officer was soon sent away; and the prévôt instantly turned to his companion, saying, "Now to the Venice cabinet, if you will. You know the way better than I—lead on."

"This way, then! this way!" answered the druggist, "we will go by the back passage;" and opening another

door, he led on through several corridors, till they entered what had been the great saloon of the hotel. They paused not to feel, and still less to comment on the gloomy aspect which association gives to a festive chamber, the lord of which is just gone down to the gloomy dust: but hurrying on as fast as possible, they entered a small room beyond, which was hung all round with rich arras tapestry, and which, besides some settles and a table, contained a large black cabinet of the kind which was at that time imported from Venice.

The druggist approached it eagerly,—and looking at the lock, and then at the keys in his hand, after some difficulty chose one, and applied it to the keyhole. What was his surprise, however, to find that the cabinet was already open, and that the whole shelves which it contained were covered with books and papers, in a state of terrible confusion.

"Curses on the old sloven!" he cried; "this will take an age to go through."

"Better take all the papers," said the prévôt, "and leave the trash of books; but at all events make haste!"

"I cannot conceal them all," replied the druggist. "Here! help me to search. They are tied up in a bundle together, with my name on the back."

The prévôt approached, and aided Ganay busily in his search; and at length the druggist himself caught a sight of the papers, lying far back in the cabinet: "Here they are! Here they are!" he cried; but at that moment—as he was reaching forth his hand to seize them—a powerful grasp was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round with a sudden start, he beheld the countenance of Albert Maurice.

Without giving him time to deliberate, the young citizen drew him forcibly back from the cabinet with his right hand, while he himself laid his left upon the very bundle of papers that Ganay had been about to take. The druggist was struck dumb with surprise, disappointment, and consternation; but Maillotin du Bac, who did not easily lose his presence of mind, exclaimed at once, "What! you here, sir president! I thought you were miles hence by this time."

"Doubtless you did," replied Albert Maurice, "doubtless you did! What do you here?"

"We seek to discover if there be any testamentary paper," replied the prévôt, who perceived that the door-

way, which opened into the saloon, was full of people; among whom he recognised none of his own band.

"And what right have you, sir, to seek for such papers?" demanded the president. "Is it a part of your office? Is it a part of your duty? You seem to consider your functions wonderfully enlarged of late! Advance, Maître Pierre," he continued, turning to one of the eschevins of the city, who had accompanied him thither. "You will do your duty in sealing up the effects of the Lord of Neufchatel. As for these papers which I have in my hand, I hold them to be necessary to the state, having seen them before, by the consent of the Lord of Neufchatel, while awaiting in this chamber of his house an examination before the council of the princess on a charge brought against me by yon prévôt. It is my intention, therefore, to keep them in my possession. But I beseech you, in the first instance, to envelop them carefully, sealing them with your own seal, after which I will be answerable for them to whatever person may prove to be the legal heir of the nobleman deceased."

Ganay's face, always pale, became perfectly cadaverous, as he heard these words; and both Albert Maurice and the prévôt believed that the only feeling at his heart, at that moment, was terror. The words he muttered to himself, however, were, "Fool! he has destroyed himself!"—and might have shown, had they been overheard, that the predominant passion of his soul,—revenge,—was still uppermost; and even overbore both consternation and surprise.

The eschevin, according to the desire of the president, sealed up the papers in an envelope, and returned them to him; and Albert Maurice, whose stern eye had turned severely from the countenance of the one culprit to the other, with an expression which made them at first believe that he meditated to exert his authority for their punishment, now once more addressed the magistrate, saying, "I must myself leave you, sir, to pursue this business alone, for it will require hard riding to overtake the troops; but I have every confidence that you will examine this suspicious affair most strictly and carefully. You know how far, according to the laws, such conduct as we have seen to-day is just or unjust, and you will take measures, without favour, to see that justice be not evaded. But you will be pleased especially to cause the body of the deceased nobleman, of

which we had but a casual glance just now, to be carefully examined by competent persons, in order to ascertain the cause of his death. My speedy return will prevent the necessity of your employing any means but those of precaution, till we meet again. In the mean time, farewell."

Thus saying, Albert Maurice, without taking any further notice either of Ganay or the prévôt, quitted the chamber; and, leaving a sufficient number of persons behind to enforce the authority of the eschevin, he proceeded to the court-yard, and, mounting his horse, galloped off.

Things that appear very extraordinary in themselves are often brought about by the simplest means; and such had been the case in regard to the interruption which Ganay and the prévôt had met with in the execution of their design. Albert Maurice had been prevented, by some casual business, from setting out himself at the hour he at first proposed; but in order that the troops might not be delayed, he suffered them to begin their march from Ghent, under their inferior officers, well knowing that, with the number of swift horses he had at his command, he could overtake them before they had advanced many miles. His way lay past the hotel of the Lord of Neufchatel; and as he was riding hastily on with a few attendants, he saw a boy drop from one of the casements, and run across the street in breathless haste. From some vague suspicion, Albert Maurice stopped him, with inquiries; and the boy at once replied, "The old lord is dead, and the prévôt and the druggist have shut all the varlets up in the hall, while they seal up the papers. So they sent me to tell the squires and men-at-arms in the other lodging."

Such tidings, joined to the previous knowledge that he possessed, was quite sufficient for Albert Maurice; and, sending instantly for one of the eschevins, who lived close by, he proceeded, at once, to the hotel, and, with his own followers, the retainers he found on the premises, and those who rapidly came over from the other side of the street, he obliged the prévôt's guard to quit the place. He then at once proceeded to the chamber of the dead man, and after a hasty examination of the corpse, which excited still stronger suspicion, he led the way silently to the room in which he knew that the papers referring to Ganay were usually kept.

All that ensued we have already seen, and, without pursuing any further the events which took place in Ghent, we shall beg leave to follow the young citizen on his journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

The transactions of the next few days, though certainly comprising matters of great interest to many of the persons connected with the present history, must be passed over as briefly as possible, because their nature is in a certain sense discordant with the general tenor of the story. This is no tale of battles; unless it be the battle of passions in the human heart; and therefore it is that we give no minute detail of the incidents which befell Albert Maurice in his short but brilliant military career. Suffice it to say, that by happy combinations, and the strenuous exertion of the great activity which was one of the most conspicuous traits in his character, he had, in the short space of five days, thrown forces into Douai and Lille, and had defeated Le Lude and a body of men-at-arms despatched from Arras to cut off his retreat.

Well aware of the mighty effect of success in blowing up the bubble of popularity, he despatched messenger after messenger to Ghent, bearing tidings of each event as it occurred. Joy and gratulation spread through the city; and the people of Ghent, elated by their novel exploits in arms, laid out in fancy vast plans of conquest and aggrandizement, and began to think themselves invincible in the field. Nor was his military success without effect upon the heart of Albert Maurice himself. It did not, it is true, produce such overweening expectations in his own bosom as it did in those of his weaker fellow-citizens. But it certainly did give him new confidence in his own powers, from the very fact of finding good fortune attend him in every effort, however new and unfamiliar to his habits and his mind. It nerved him to dare all, and to struggle against every difficulty; and the combination of constant occupation and repeated triumph drowned, for the time, those feelings of remorse and self-upbraiding which, day by day, had been acquir-

ing a stronger hold upon his heart. Besides, it communicated to his mind the refreshing consciousness of being energetically employed in the execution of duties totally unmingled with any baser motive in their origin, or any degrading means in their progress. In the actions which he performed during these four days, he felt that for the first time he was really serving his country, that he was winning a purer glory, and gaining a nobler name, than faction or intrigue—whatever might be its object, and whatever might be its result—could ever obtain for man; and his heart expanded with a joy long unknown, when at night he summed up the events of the day, and found that another sun had risen and set on deeds which he could dare all the world to scrutinize.

Still the necessity of his immediate return to Ghent was not the less felt; and as soon as ever he had accomplished the great purpose of his expedition, he commenced his march homewards, and pursued it with as much rapidity as possible.

His force was, by this time, reduced to a thousand horse, from the various reinforcements he had thrown into the frontier towns; but nevertheless, confident of his own powers, he took the way towards Ghent, by the neighbourhood of Tournay, although various bands detached from the garrison of that city were continually making excursions into the country around. He fixed his quarters for the night, after his first day's march homeward, in a little village about three miles to the east of that town; and, taking such precautions as were necessary to guard against surprise, he passed the hours of darkness undisturbed. It was a fine spring morning when he again put his troops in motion. The sun had just risen; and the fresh, elastic air, driving the vapours of the night before it, had gathered together in the north a wide extent of dark clouds, streaked with the whiter mists that were every moment carried to join them by the wind; while, over all the rest of the sky, the bright sunshine was pouring triumphantly, and flashing upon the diamond drops that the night had left behind on every spray and every blade of grass.

The body of horse which the young citizen commanded moved on quickly, but cautiously, through the by-roads and less direct paths which led between Tournay and Ath; and it had proceeded in this manner for about an hour, when the distant sound of a culverin, followed by

a heavy discharge of artillery, was borne upon his ear from the westward. The troopers listened eagerly, with no small curiosity written on their countenances; but the face of Albert Maurice scarcely betrayed that he heard the sounds, except by a curl of the lip, slight, indeed, but bitter and contemptuous. He rode on without comment, however; and, in a short time afterward, as he led his force over the summit of a small hill, he could perceive, on looking towards Tournay—which place was hidden itself by some wavy ground that intervened—a long stream of thick, white smoke, drifting down the valley in which that city stands. He drew in his horse for a moment, and gazed upon the sight; and then, putting his force into a quicker pace, pursued his road onward towards Ghent.

The path which they were following entered, at about the distance of two miles from the place where they then were, the high road from Tournay to Oudenarde; and, passing among some woody grounds, it lay very much concealed from observation. As they came near the open road, however, Albert Maurice himself proceeded a little in advance of the line to reconnoitre, before he led his forces forth from the less exposed ground below. But ere he reached it, the sounds that he heard were sufficient to satisfy him that the highway was occupied by some party of armed men, either friends or foes. As the prospect of meeting with the forces commanded by the Duke of Gueldres was little less disagreeable to him than that of encountering a superior body of the enemy, he now halted his men, and rode slowly along the narrow border of copse which separated the low grounds from the high road, in order to ascertain who were his immediate neighbours, and what was the direction they were taking. The trampling of horses, the jingling of armour, laughter, merriment, and oaths, announced sufficiently the presence of some military force; and the moment after, a break in the belt of wood showed him the rear of a body of horsemen passing on in a continuous but somewhat irregular line towards Tournay; while the straight crosses of cut cloth which they wore sewed upon their gambesons at once designated them as the adherents of France in opposition to Burgundy, the partisans of which dukedom were as universally designated by a cross-cross, or cross of St. Andrew.

The young burgher paused for several minutes; and fixing his eye upon a break some way farther down the road, watched till the spears and plumes began to pass by that aperture also, and, by means of the two, easily ascertained that the party he beheld did not amount to more than five hundred men. Though from various traces of recent strife, joined to the merriment that reigned among them, he judged,—and judged rightly,—that the French were returning to Tournay after some successful skirmish, which, he doubted not, had taken place with the Duke of Gueldres; yet, the superiority of his own numbers, and his confidence in his own powers, determined him immediately to attack the enemy.

This resolution was no sooner formed than executed; and although the space was narrow for the evolutions of cavalry,—the road having on one side a large piece of marshy ground, and on the other a scattered wood,—yet so unprepared were the French for the attack of the Gandois, and so skilfully did the young citizen employ a raw against a veteran force, that the old soldiers of Louis at once gave way before the fresh levies of Ghent; and while many a man found an ignoble death in the morass, those were the happiest who, by sharp spurring, made their way unscathed to Tournay.

A battery of small cannon, which enfiladed the part of the road that led directly to the gate, protected the fugitives in their retreat; and Albert Maurice, not fully aware of the state of the garrison, and the amount of forces it could pour forth upon his small body, hastened to retreat from before the walls as soon as he found himself exposed to their artillery. The way seemed clear before him; yet—as he knew that the enterprise of the Duke of Gueldres was to have taken place about that time, and from the firing he had heard in the morning, doubted not it had been attempted on that very day,—he could not believe that so small a party as that which he had just driven back within the walls would have ventured forth alone against the superior force of the Gandois; and he felt sure that some larger body of French troops must still lie between him and the retreating army of the Duke of Gueldres.

Under these circumstances, and fearful of tarnishing the gloss of his success by encountering a defeat at last, he caused the country to be well reconnoitred as he advanced; and ere long, the reported appearance of a

large force seen moving in the line of the high road, about a league in advance, made him resolve once more to take the paths through the wood to the east, however circuitous and inconvenient, being very well assured from his knowledge of the country, and from his acquaintance with the plans of the people of Ghent, that the line of operations of either party could not have extended far to the east of the *Chemin d'Oudenarde*, as the high road was called.

He accordingly at once quitted the broad causeway which led directly to Ghent, and passing across some of the wide yellow mustard fields that lay to the right, he gained, unobserved, the shelter of the scattered woods through which he had been before advancing. As he marched on, however, the appearance of some of the fearful marks of warfare—now a slain horse—now a long track of blood—now some piece of armour, or some offensive weapon cast away in flight—showed that a deadly strife must have passed not far from the ground over which he was marching. These tokens of war, however, soon became less frequent; and, by care and circumspection, he passed on without encountering any of the bands of either party which were scattered over that part of the province. Not knowing the state of the country, and determined, whatever were the case, to force his way onward to Ghent without loss of time, he did not choose to detach any parties from his main body; but he was of course very anxious for intelligence, and it was not long before he received as much as was necessary for the purpose of determining his after proceedings. Ere he had marched half a league, several stragglers belonging to the army of Ghent joined his force; and from them he learned, that on that very morning the Duke of Gueldres had attacked and burned the suburbs of Tournay; but that in effecting his retreat, his rear-guard had been charged by a small force from the town, and had been nearly cut to pieces, notwithstanding extraordinary efforts on the part of the duke himself. That prince was reported to be dead or taken, and the rest of the army had retreated in no small confusion upon Oudenarde.

This discomfiture of the Flemish forces, and the disgrace inflicted on his country, were of course painful as a whole to the young citizen; but there were parts of the detail which were not so unpleasant; for his

successes of course stood out in brighter light from their contrast with the failure of the larger division; and as it appeared by the account of the fugitives that the party which had defeated the Duke of Gueldres was the very same that he himself had in turn overthrown and driven into Tournay, the mortification would be in some degree softened to the people of Ghent, while he could not find in his heart to grieve very bitterly for their defeated commander.

The intelligence that he now received of the state of the garrison of Tournay—which it appeared was very scanty, but bold and enterprising in the extreme—made him resolve to halt for the night at the first village on the road, in order to keep the forces of that city in check, while the dispersed parties of Flemings effected their retreat. He accordingly took up his quarters in the little town of Frasne, on the edge of the wood, and immediately sent out parties to reconnoitre the country, and bring in any stragglers they might meet with. But few were found, however, and from their information, the young burgher was led to suppose that the great body of the forces, which had issued from Ghent two days before, had made good its retreat, without any further loss than the discomfiture of its rear-guard.

By the time these facts were perfectly ascertained, the evening was too far advanced to make any farther movement; and Albert Maurice, having taken measures to hold his present position in security, laid by the weighty armour with which, according to the custom of the day, he was encumbered on the march, and strolled out alone into the wood, to give way to thoughts which had long been sternly pressing for attention. He was now returning towards Ghent, where he could not hide from himself that new scenes of intrigue, of anxiety, and of trouble lay before him. His previous conduct in the same career had given birth to regrets which he had determined to scan, and try more accurately than he ever yet had done; and from his judgment on the past, to form a firm and inflexible determination for the future. He found too that now was the moment when the self-examination must begin, if ever it was to be attempted; and many circumstances combined to render it less painful than it had appeared before. Previous to the expedition in which he was now engaged, the

commune with his own heart had offered so little but pure bitterness, that he had avoided it with care. But his recent successes, in which was to be found no matter for self-reproach, afforded him something wherewith to balance more painful contemplations; and with a decided purpose of indulging that craving for calm reflection which had long preyed upon him, he went forth totally alone, merely saying to his attendants that he would speedily return.

Of course, it is not possible to follow the thoughts of Albert Maurice through all the tortuous and uncertain ways which the human heart pursues in its examination of itself. The result, however, was painful. He compared what he had done, now that power was given into his hands, with what he had proposed to do when that power existed but in expectation. Not six months before he had determined, if ever circumstances should favour the exertion of his abilities in the wide arena of political strife, to dedicate all the talents and energy of his mind solely to the good of his country—to free her from oppression—to remedy the evils of her situation—to open the way for arts and civilization—to place laws and rights upon such a footing that they could never be doubted nor destroyed—and to accomplish all this by the most calm and peaceful means, without spilling one unnecessary drop of blood—without causing one eye through all the land to shed a tear.

Such had been his purpose—but what had been his conduct, and what had he become? He had appropriated nearly the whole power of the state. He had obtained influence greater than his fondest expectations had held out. He had not improved one law. He had not removed one evil. He had seen, under his own authority, anarchy substituted for civil order and domestic peace. He had involved himself in the meanest wiles of faction and intrigue. He had seen innocent blood shed by the hands of the populace. He had himself brought about the death of two noble-minded men, who, his own heart told him, were innocent of the crimes with which they were charged, and conscience thundered in his ear that they were murdered for his ambition. He could no longer look upon himself as a patriot. He knew himself to have become solely an ambitious demagogue; and, look around him on which side he would, he saw no means of extricating himself or

his country from the state into which he had aided to immerse it, but by pursuing the same dark and intricate intrigues—the mean cunning of which he felt bitterly to be degrading to his better nature—by shedding more blood, by stirring up more discord, and by plunging deeper and deeper into the abyss of anarchy and confusion.

While such a conviction forced itself upon his mind, he almost shrank from himself; and the small, still voice within whispered that but one way was left—to yield the hand of Mary of Burgundy to any prince whose state and situation offered the most immediate prospect of benefit and support to his country—to make the price of that fair hand and the rich dowry that went with it the full recognition of such popular rights as would put the freedom and prosperity of Flanders for ever beyond a doubt—and on his own part to resign the hopes and aspirations that had led him so far astray. But those hopes—those aspirations—had become parts of his very soul; and to require him to cast them from him was but to bid him die. As the bare idea crossed his mind of resigning Mary of Burgundy—of seeing her in the arms of another—the blood rushed up into his head with violence; and he paused abruptly on his way, resolved, if thought presented such images, to think no more. The good and the evil principle were in his heart at eternal war: calm reflection instantly gave the good full promise of victory; but the evil had but to call up the idea of Mary of Burgundy as the wife of another, in order to banish reflection altogether, and every better purpose along with it.

He had, by this time, advanced pretty far into the wood, and the faint gray of the sky announced that the sun was sinking rapidly below the horizon, and warned him to return to the village. The road he had followed was a long grassy path, cut by the wheels of the wood-carts; and there was no mistaking his way back. But, as he paused, determined to think no more, since thought required such bitter sacrifices, he looked onward vacantly, ere he turned, directing his mind to external things, the better to withdraw it from himself. As he did so, he remarked, at the bottom of the slope, down which the path proceeded, some large white object lying among the long grass which fringed a little forest stream. The distance was not more than two

hundred yards in advance; and attracted, he knew not very well why, he strode on almost unconsciously towards the spot. As he came nearer, the object which had caught his eye assumed the form of a horse, either dead or asleep; and to ascertain which was the case he still walked forward, till he stood close beside it, and found that it was the carcass of a splendid charger, which had dropped, apparently, from exhaustion and loss of blood. A rich military saddle, and a poitrel inlaid with gold, announced that the rank of the rider must have been high; while a fresh wound in the poor beast's side, and another in his thigh, seemed to show that he had been engaged in the skirmish of that morning.

Albert Maurice gazed on the horse for a moment, not exactly with indifference; but with no great interest in a sight which had been frequently before his eyes during the last two or three days. The thing that principally attracted his attention, indeed, was the costliness of the caparisons; and he looked round the little glade in which he now stood, to see if he could perceive any further traces of the horse's owner. His eye instantly rested upon a pile of splendid arms, cast heedlessly down at a little distance; and as he walked forward to examine them also, a man started up, as if from sleep, among the fern which there thickly clothed the forest ground, exclaiming, "Who goes there?"

A single glance sufficed to show Albert Maurice that he stood in presence of the Duke of Gueldres; and that prince was almost as soon aware of whom he himself had encountered. No great love existed between them, it is true; but a natural feeling of compassion for the defeat and disappointment which the duke had that day sustained, and a conviction that that defeat, together with his own success, had removed all danger from the rivalry of the other, greatly softened the feelings of enmity in the bosom of the young citizen; and a word would have disarmed him entirely. The contrary, however, was the case with Adolphus of Gueldres, who, naturally furious and impatient, became almost insane by defeat and disgrace. He had heard, too, it would seem, of the late successes of Albert Maurice; and jealousy and envy were thus added to hatred. His words and his manner had been quick and vehement, even before he had seen who it was that roused him. But no sooner did he distinguish the fea-

tures of the young citizen, than the thought of his own overthrow, and of the triumph of Albert Maurice, mingled with remembrance of the opposition he had formerly met with, and the cool contempt with which he had been treated on their last meeting, all rose up in his mind; and his countenance became convulsed with passion.

"Ha!" he cried, "you here, sir mechanic! you here to insult and triumph over me!—Or have you come to finish out what we but began in the town-hall of Ghent? Doubtless you have!—quick then, quick! Draw, sir—draw your sword, I say! Thank God, there is no one here, either to part us, or to see the Duke of Gueldres stain his blade with the blood of a low citizen!"

Albert Maurice himself was not, naturally, the most patient of men; and he instantly laid his hand upon his sword. But a better feeling checked him the moment after; and he paused in the act, saying, "You had better reflect, my lord!" But before he could add another word the Duke of Gueldres struck him a blow with the pommel of his weapon, that made him reel; and in the next moment their blades were crossed.

Complete master of every military exercise, powerful, active, quick-sighted, and calm, Albert Maurice was far more than a match for the Duke of Gueldres, though that prince had always been reputed a stout and skilful man-at-arms. So great, indeed, did the young president feel his own superiority to be, that had he not been heated in some degree by the blow he had received, he would most probably have contented himself with wounding or disarming his antagonist. But he *was* heated with the insult; and in four passes, the sword of the Duke of Gueldres—turned from its course—was wounding the empty air over the shoulder of Albert Maurice, while the blade of the young citizen passed direct through the chest of his adversary.

Albert Maurice recovered his weapon, and gazed for a moment on the duke, whose mortal career he felt must be at its close. But that unhappy prince stood before him for an instant, still holding his sword, and still apparently firm upon his feet, though a ghastly swimming of his eyes showed what a convulsive agony was moving his frame within. He made no further effort to lunge again; but he stood there by a sort of rigid effort, which sufficed for a time to keep him from falling,

though that was all. The next moment the sword dropped. He reeled giddily; and then fell back with a fearful sort of sobbing in his throat.

Albert Maurice knelt down beside him, and strove to stanch the blood (which was now flowing copiously from his wounds), at least in such a degree as to enable him to speak, should he have any directions to give before he died. He brought some water, also, from the brook hard by, and sprinkled his face; and the duke almost instantly opened his eyes, and gazed wildly about for a moment. Then, as his glance met that of Albert Maurice, he exclaimed, in the same harsh and brutal tone he had before used, "You have slain me, fellow! you have slain me! Out upon it, churl! you have spilt some of the best blood of the land."

"My lord," said Albert Maurice solemnly, "you have brought it on yourself. But oh! think not of that at this moment. You are dying. There is such a thing as another world; and, oh! repent you of your sins while you are yet in this."

"Is it *you* tell me to repent!" cried the duke faintly, —"you, who have shortened my time for repentance. What know you of my sins!"

"Nothing, but by report, my lord," replied the young citizen; "except, indeed—except on one occasion,—the fire at the pleasure-house of Lindenmar—the death of the young heir of Hannut!"

The duke groaned. "Oh! were that all," cried he— "were that all,—that might soon be pardoned. For my own hands in some degree undid what my own voice commanded. But stay, stay," he added, speaking far more quickly, "stay, I may do some good yet. The old man, they say, still grieves for his child. Fly to him quick. Tell him the boy did not die in the flames of Lindenmar. Tell him—tell him that I bore him away myself. Tell him that, bad as I was, I could not resist the look of helpless infancy; that I carried him away wrapped in my mantle; and when my own boy died, bred him as my own; that I was kind to him—that I loved him, till the butchers of Duke Philip murdered him, when they cast me into prison at Namur."

A light broke at once upon the mind of the young citizen. "Good God!" he cried,—"he is not dead. He lives, my lord—he lives. He escaped—found refuge with his own father—ay, and was instrumental in pro-

curing your liberation from prison. He lives—indeed he lives."

The eyes of the Duke of Gueldres fixed upon him as he spoke, with an intense and half-doubting gaze. But as the young burgher repeated earnestly, "He lives," the dying man, by a great effort, half-raised himself from the ground, clasped his hands together, and exclaimed, "Thank God!" They were the last words he ever spoke; for almost as he uttered them, he closed his eyes as if a faint sickness had come over him—fell back upon the turf with a convulsive shudder—and in a few moments Adolphus of Gueldres was no more.

Albert Maurice gazed upon him with a feeling of painful interest. He had slain him, it is true, under circumstances which he believed to justify the deed. But no one, that is not in heart a butcher, can, under any circumstances, take life hand to hand, without feeling that a cloud has settled over existence for ever. There is always something to be remembered—always something that can never be forgotten. In the case of the young citizen, too, the cloud was of a deeper shade; for he felt that in the death of the Duke of Gueldres,—however much justified by the immediate provocation,—he had taken another life in that course of ambition, in which he felt that many more must fall.

Thus, in gloomy bitterness, he took his way back to the village, and, without any explanation, gave orders that the dead body should be brought in with honour. The soldiers concluded that both horse and man had died by the hands of the enemy; and Albert Maurice, in quitting his quarters the next morning, gave strict directions that the remains of the deceased prince should be sent after him immediately to Ghent. Before a bier could be got ready, however, and all the necessary preparations entered into, a party from the town of Tournay swept the little village of Frasne; and the body of the duke, being found there, was carried away by the French. Due honours were shown to the corpse by the people of Tournay; and many of the writers of that age attribute the death of Adolphus, the bad duke of Gueldres, to the successful sortie of the garrison of that city.

CHAPTER XV.

It was barely dawn when Albert Maurice began his last day's march towards Ghent; and though the distance was considerable, at the hour of three in the afternoon he was within a league of the city. The number of armed men that he now met with—both single individuals and small bands—showed him that the force which had retreated from before Tournay must have lately passed. And with a sort of anxious apprehension in regard to the machinations which might have taken place in Ghent during his absence, he spoke personally with almost all the stragglers he overtook; and, by a few kind words, easily induced a number of the parties of half-disciplined burghers and peasantry to join the small force he was leading into Ghent—most of them being very willing to pass for part of a conquering rather than part of a conquered army.

At the distance of about two miles from the city—at a point where the town itself was hidden by a detached wood—Albert Maurice perceived a small body of horsemen coming slowly towards him; but as such a sight had nothing extraordinary in it, he took but little heed of the party till it was within a hundred yards, when, to his unutterable surprise, he beheld the portly figure of worthy Martin Fruse leading the van on horseback,—a situation which the good burgher, as may well be remembered, had never coveted in his most agile and enterprising age, but which had become quite abhorrent to his feelings now that years and bulk had weighed down all activity.

"Halt your troops!—halt your troops, my dear boy!" cried the worthy merchant, in some trepidation. "Halt your troops, and listen to me while I tell you—"

"Had you not better speak with the honourable president apart?" said one of the party, in whom Albert Maurice instantly recognised Maître Pierre, the eschevin who had been called to examine the dwelling of the old Lord of Neufchatel; although, on glancing his eye over the rest, he could recall the face of none other among

the stout men-at-arms, of which the chief part of the band was composed.

Seeing that there was something to be communicated, and judging that no very agreeable intelligence awaited him, from the evident agitation of his friends, he gave the command to halt his little force; and then leading the way into the meadow, begged his uncle to explain the cause of his perturbation.

Martin Fruse began with a violent declamation upon the evils of riding on horseback, and the perils thereupon attending; but he ended with a recapitulation of dangers somewhat more real, which awaited his nephew if he ventured within the gates of Ghent. It seemed that the violent party—as Albert Maurice had apprehended—had, under the skilful tactics of the druggist Ganay, completely outmanœuvred the little junto that the young president had left to keep them in check; and now that it was too late, Albert Maurice perceived that he had suffered his thirst for military renown to lead him aside from the paths of saner policy. Ganay himself had become the supreme object of the people's adoration; and having leagued himself by some skilful management with the Duke of Cleves on the one hand, and the populace on the other, he had been entirely successful in all the measures he had proposed to the council of magistrates. The states general had not again met, it was true, but a new party had been created in the town. The city of Ghent, in fact, had become completely divided, but divided unequally; for though a strong and influential body had attached themselves to Martin Fruse, the multitude adhered to his opponent.

Ganay, indeed, the worthy burgher said, not daring openly to assail one whose successes in the field were daily subject of rejoicing with the citizens, affected to act upon the instructions and desires of Albert Maurice himself; and the complete, or rather apparent, union between them, which had formerly existed, had aided to deceive the people. Martin Fruse had reproached the druggist, and reasoned with the magistrates, in vain; and all that he had gained was the certainty that, from some cause which he could not define, Ganay had become his nephew's most bitter enemy, though he still affected to regard him as a friend. Private information, also, had reached Martin Fruse early in the morning, that—as soon as it had been ascertained that the young

citizen was on his march with the intention of reaching the city in the course of the day—Ganay, supported both by the nobility under the Duke of Cleves, and by the more violent members of the states, had determined to arrest the president that very night, at a grand banquet to be given in honour of his return; and the large body of discontented soldiery which had been pouring into the town during the day, and who were already jealous of those who had been more successful than themselves, seemed to offer the means of accomplishing this purpose in security. Martin Fruse, losing all presence of mind at the danger of his beloved nephew, had determined to quit the city, and to meet and warn the object of this conspiracy, of his danger, ere he entered the town. The eschevin who had been called to the hotel of the Lord of Neufchatel, conscious that some suspicions he had let fall concerning the death of that nobleman had rendered him obnoxious to the party which for the time appeared triumphant, had joined the good burgher; and the danger that seemed to threaten all had even overcome the objection of Martin Fruse to the use of a horse.

This tale was soon told; and Albert Maurice, from his own private knowledge of all the springs that were moving the dark cabals within the walls of the city before him, saw much deeper into the dangers and difficulties of his own situation than those who detailed the circumstances which had occurred since his departure. He saw that the crisis of his fate was come; and without once entertaining the vain thought of avoiding it, he merely paused to calculate how he might pass through it most triumphantly.

Fear or hesitation, doubt or even anxiety, never seemed to cross his mind for a moment. He felt, it is true, that his victory or his fall must be now complete, and that he was marching forward to a strife that must be final and decisive: but still he was eager to bring the whole to a close—perhaps from that confidence in his own powers which is ever one great step towards success. He heard his uncle to an end with an unchanged countenance; and then, without a single observation on the intelligence he had just received, he spoke a few words to the eschevin, in a low tone, in regard to the inquisition he had charged him to make in the house of the old Lord of Neufchatel. The answers seemed to

satisfy him well; for ever and anon he bowed his head with a calm but somewhat bitter smile, saying merely, "So! Ay! Is it so?"

At length he demanded suddenly,—pointing to a man-at-arms who had come up with his uncle and the party that had accompanied him, and now sat with his visor up, displaying a fresh and weather-beaten countenance, well seamed with scars of ancient wounds,—"Who is that? I should know his face."

"That," whispered his uncle, riding close up to him—"that is good Matthew Gournay, the captain of adventurers who was with us in the year fifty, when we made a stand against the Count of Charolois. He said you had sent for him."

"I did, I did!" replied the young burgher; "but I had forgotten all about it, in the events that have since taken place. Where is the prisoner I left in the town prison?"

"Ay! there is one of their bold acts," answered Martin Fruse; and, as he spoke, the countenance of Albert Maurice turned deadly pale, thinking they had put to death the man he had promised to set free; but his uncle soon relieved him. "Ay! there is one of their bold acts," he said; "they have moved him from the town-house to the prévôt's prison near the gates, and threaten to do him to death to-morrow by cock-crow. Maillotin du Bac would fain have had him tried by the eschevins this morning; but the Duke of Cleves made so long a speech, and brought so much other business before the council, that they agreed to put it off till to-morrow; when he is to be interrogated at six o'clock, and have the question at seven, if he refuse to confess."

Again the president mused, without reply, though he saw that to extort confessions which would tend to create a charge against him might be the object of the prévôt in reserving the Vert Gallant for the torture. At length, riding up to the old man-at-arms, he led him apart, and conversed with him earnestly for near a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time he conducted him, with the dozen of troopers who accompanied him, to the last constabulary of the horse, which had shared in his own successful expedition, and then spoke a few words with the constable, or leader of the troop, who, with a low reverence, dropped back among his men. The followers of Matthew Gournay fell into the ranks;

the adventurer put himself at their head; and scarcely a difference was perceivable in the order of the band.

As soon as all this was completed, Albert Maurice rode back to his uncle and the rest of his party, and informed them calmly that it was absolutely necessary, notwithstanding all the events which had lately taken place, that they should return to Ghent, and re-enter the town by one of the opposite gates; so as to leave it at least doubtful whether they had or had not held any communication with himself.

What he required of them was, perhaps, somewhat hard, considering that they were peaceful men, who had no small reason to fear for their lives, and had no immediate stimulus to make them risk so much willingly.

But Martin Fruse had seen his nephew accomplish such great things in the face of every sort of probability, and the tone in which Albert Maurice spoke was so calm and assured, that the wishes of the young citizen were received as commands; and the small party of citizens, now left without an escort, rode off; while the young president still halted on the road, to give them time to make the circuit proposed before his entrance.

As soon as he judged that this object was accomplished, Albert Maurice again put his troops in motion, and advanced slowly towards the city. As he emerged from the low wood that had hitherto screened him, he despatched a trumpet to announce his approach to the council of Ghent and the states of Flanders; and directed the messenger especially to speak with Signior Ganay, one of the magistrates of the town. He then resumed a quicker pace, and approached rapidly the walls of the city.

Before he reached the gates, however, it became evident that his harbinger had not spared the spur, and had already executed his commission. A large body of horsemen were seen to issue forth, accompanied by a crowd on foot; and loud shouts of joy and gratulation met the ear of Albert Maurice,—showing that the populace at least, to whom Ganay had first made his court by affecting friendship for their victorious president, had not yet become aware of the designs of his enemies. But such demonstrations of the popular joy on his return were received by Albert Maurice as no sign that the purpose of destroying him did not exist; nor as any

reason for expecting that his overthrow would not be attempted; nor as any proof that the people would oppose or resent it; for no one knew better than himself how slight a charge will condemn the most innocent before the fierce tribunal of the multitude, or felt more bitterly how readily those who now greeted his return would shout at his execution.

He was surprised, however, as the two parties drew near each other, to find that the body which had issued forth to receive him was headed by Ganay himself, and was composed of all those whom he had the greatest reason to look upon as his political enemies. But Albert Maurice was not to be deceived; and though he received the compliments and gratulations of the citizens on his return, and their thanks for his great services, with a smiling countenance, and bland untroubled brow, yet his mind clearly divined the motives of so much courtesy; and he internally scoffed at the grossness of the deceit they attempted to play off upon him. He bowed, and smiled, and doffed his cap and plume to every one who affected to congratulate him; but he well understood that he was surrounded by doubtful friends or concealed enemies; and watched carefully every changing expression of the faces round him.

The populace on foot, who crowded round, with loud and vehement shouts of "Long live the noble president! Long live the conqueror of Le Lude!" he clearly saw were sincere enough. But in the set speeches and formal courtesy of the different members of the states he beheld much to distrust, and calmly prepared for those great and bold measures which were alone fitted to meet the exigency of the moment.

Albert Maurice was a reader of the human countenance,—a book, every volume of which is easy to comprehend when we know the language in which it is written, or, in other words, when we understand the general character of the individual. Ganay was a master in the art of dissimulation; but the young citizen was so intimately acquainted with every turn of his dark mind, that even the slight traces which he suffered to appear were as legible to Albert Maurice as if he had seen into his heart. He marked a transient and scarcely perceptible shade come over the brow of the druggist whenever the people vociferated their noisy welcome. He saw, too, that ever, on each shout, Ganay

redoubled his attention to himself; and he clearly perceived that, from the moment they met, his former friend attached himself to his side, and strove anxiously to prevent his holding any private communication with the leaders of his troops. From all this, he judged that the tidings he had received from Martin Fruse were substantially correct; and that the honours shown to him on his return were only to deceive the people, while any act that was meditated against him was to be executed at night, after the lower orders had retired to rest.

Albert Maurice affected to be entirely deceived, and rode on with the party who had come to welcome him, with every appearance of friendship and confidence. He spoke freely and calmly with those around him; addressed Ganay frequently in a low and confidential tone; and, at the same time, assumed all that state and dignity which he knew that his enemies expected him to display. He marked, too, with a feeling of suppressed scorn, the significant glances which passed between his foes, as—taking on himself the principal place, and with an air and demeanour which might have suited the most potent monarch in Christendom—he rode through the gates of Ghent amid the acclamations of the people.

While thus Albert Maurice proceeded, surrounded by a great number of the high citizens, the troops he commanded followed in a long line, now swelled to the amount of nearly fifteen hundred men. The whole cavalcade moved on towards the market-place; but some persons, who remained near the drawbridge, remarked that the last band of soldiers did not follow the rest; but, halting at the gate, relieved the guard that was there on duty, and then passed on, in a different direction, by the low streets which ran under the walls. At the same time, however, three of the troopers were detached, and, at once, repassing the gates, galloped off at full speed, in the direction of Heusden and Melle. It was further observed, and commented upon in other days, that in about two hours afterward, three bands of men-at-arms came up from the same quarter, at a quick pace, and entered the city, without even being questioned by the guard. To what spot they went in the city was not very clearly ascertained, but it was generally reported that they made their way in small parties to the town-house.

In the mean while, Albert Maurice and the rest pursued their march towards that building, the crowds increasing every moment as they passed, and rending the air with their acclamations. With his helmet, lance, and shield carried by pages behind him, as if he had been the most distinguished knight in the land—with his cap and plume in his hand, and bowing his fine head low at every shout of the multitude, the young citizen advanced towards what was called the Perron of the Hotel de Ville, on which he found collected, to do him honour, the Duke of Cleves and a number of the other nobles of the town and neighbourhood. Knowing their league against him, and what a mockery they considered this public reception of a simple burgher, Albert Maurice could scarcely prevent the scorn he felt in his heart from curling his proud lip. But he did prevent it, and merely thinking, like Hamlet,—"They fool me to the top of my bent,"—he dismounted from his horse at the steps and played exactly the part which he well knew they expected from him. After receiving, with a degree both of haughtiness and humility, the gratulations of the nobles upon his successful expedition, he turned and addressed the lower orders of Ghent in a long and flattering harangue, throughout which, the close of every period was drowned in the enthusiastic cheers of the populace.

"It were hard, my friends," he added in conclusion, "that you should all come out hither to welcome my return, and I should give you no sign of my good-will. Fain would I have you all to sup with me; but, in good faith, there are so many here,—some twenty thousand, as I guess,—that no house could hold the multitude I see around me. However, it is a fair and beautiful evening, and there is no better roof than the sky. Now, as these noble lords and worthy merchants have invited me to banquet with them within, I invite you all to sup here in the market-place, and by seven of the clock you shall find good ale and beef enough to satisfy you, if I give the last stiver of my private fortune to entertain the good artisans of Ghent."

A loud shout burst from the people, but Ganay and his friends exchanged glances not of the most pleasant kind. Nor were their looks rendered more placid when they heard an order given by the young president to his troops, purporting that they were to stable their horses

in whatever sheds they could find round the market-place, and to quarter themselves in the wide halls and vacant chambers of the Hotel de Ville. Ganay even ventured to remonstrate against turning the town-house into a barrack, but he was instantly silenced by Albert Maurice.

"I have heard, my excellent good friend," he replied, "since my return to Ghent, that the fifteen thousand men, who were driven like sheep from before Tournay, have been received in this city, and quartered in the different barracks. I know, therefore, that there can be no room to spare, and what you urge with regard to the illegality of bringing troops into the town-house, you must well know does not apply in the present case. The troops which I have resolved to station there are the troops of the city of Ghent, not those of either a foreign or a native prince."

"But for the informality of the thing," urged Ganay, seeing that by the very measures which he had taken to secure the safe execution of his purpose against the young citizen, he had in fact overreached himself—"but for the informality of the thing, would it not be better, as there is no room for them in the town, to march them into any of the pleasant little villages in the neighbourhood?"

"What!" exclaimed Albert Maurice, assuming an air of indignation; "what! make the victorious troops that have so well served the city give place to those who have brought nothing but disgrace upon us! No, no, Master Ganay, let us hear no more of this. My orders must be obeyed;" and so saying, he turned and advanced towards the door of the town-house.

A short and rapid conversation was now carried on, in a low tone, between the druggist and the Duke of Cleves, as they ascended the steps towards the hall. "It will be impossible to-night," whispered the noble.

"If he live over to-morrow," replied Ganay, "no earthly power will overthrow him."

A few words succeeded, in so low a tone, that even, by the parties who spoke, their meaning was probably gathered more completely by their mutual looks than by any distinct sounds. A white-haired old soldier, however, who was pushing up the steps after the young president, just heard Ganay add, "If I do, will you justify and defend me?"

"Any thing to get rid of him!" replied the duke emphatically; and they both passed on.

The sun was, by this time, beginning to descend in the western sky; and on entering the town-house, the young citizen retired to the apartments which had been assigned him in that building, and remained long in consultation with various persons, who were admitted to him one after another. The individuals who thus visited him were all marked by the opposite faction, which remained in the other parts of the town-house; and it was seen that, besides Martin Fruse, and a number of the burghers adhering to the party of that good citizen, almost all the leaders of the bands which had accompanied the young president in his expedition to Lille and Douai were admitted, and remained with him long.

All this, however, appeared natural enough; and though his troops, in quartering themselves in different parts of the building, according to his orders, seemed to take upon themselves a tone of authority and power not very pleasing to his adversaries; yet this also might pass for the swagger and insolence of military success; nor did it excite any very great surprise. As the evening went on, however, a number of persons were observed ascending to his apartments whose faces no one recognised. Some staid, and some returned; but it was evident that they were not citizens of Ghent, and great was the anxiety and discussion which these appearances caused among the enemies of the young citizen. Every means was taken to discover whence they came and what was their errand, but it was all in vain. The Duke of Cleves retired to his own hotel, to prepare for the scenes that were about to take place; and Ganay waited eagerly the coming of the hour appointed for the banquet, which would put an end, he believed, for ever, to transactions which, from many causes, he both doubted and feared.

Nevertheless, his sensations were of a mixed and even painful nature; and his conclusions in regard to the young citizen's conduct were less clear and decided than they had ever been before. He did not and would not believe that Albert Maurice suspected the precise design of those who had contrived his overthrow; but he saw evidently that he was not deceived by all the fair appearances which had welcomed him back to Ghent; and he felt that the moment was come when, as the president had long before foreseen, the immediate

destruction of the one was necessary to the safety of the other. That conviction in his own bosom of course made him believe that Albert Maurice was equally alive to the same fact; and as the means which he had so carefully prepared during the absence of the other had been, in some degree, rendered vain by the measures that the president had taken, the druggist now stood resolved to snatch the first opportunity of executing his purpose by any means, however great the risk, well knowing that the peril of delay was still greater.

And yet, strange to say, there was within the bosom of that man,—hardened as he was by crimes, and still more hardened by the struggle of passions concealed within his breast through a long life,—strange to say, there was a feeling of deep regret, of bitter repugnance, when he thought of the very act he planned for his own security. If ever there had been, in the course of all his existence, a being that he had sincerely loved, besides his own unhappy son, that being had been Albert Maurice: and though, in the scenes of civil faction and the strife of contending interests and desires which they had lately passed through, that affection had been apparently smothered, it is wonderful how freshly it rose up in his heart when he thought that Albert Maurice must die by his means,—possibly by his own hand.

The fatal creed he held of man's entire mortality made him fearless of death himself, and careless of inflicting it on others; but, perhaps, by teaching him that the loves and affections of this life were all, it made them take a deeper hold upon his heart when once they could grasp it by any means; and for a moment, as he thought of cutting off the noble being whose powers he had so often admired,—of extinguishing for ever all those fiery energies and bright aspirations he had watched from their first breaking forth to their full expansion,—he shuddered at the task.

The people without, witnessing the preparations for the banquet to which the young citizen had invited them, from time to time shouted forth his name with loud applause, and there was a voice within the bosom of Ganay that echoed their praises. "He is indeed a splendid creature," he thought; "and if ever there was one calculated to win all hearts, and lead men and nations on to scenes and glories such as the world has never yet seen, he is the man. Yet, after all, he must die!—

and 'tis but like the slaughter of a mighty stag or a noble boar; and death,—which ends all things,—perhaps, when the pain and the pleasure of life are fairly balanced, is the crowning good that renders the whole equal at last; but I must speed to see all prepared!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Never had the town of Ghent witnessed so magnificent a sight as on the night after the return of Albert Maurice. The whole market-place before the Stadthuys, illuminated by a thousand torches, was crowded with people regaling at long tables, which groaned beneath the burden of good cheer. The young president had spared no means to satisfy all; and, by the magic influence of gold, had, in the short time which had elapsed since his return, conjured up a festival more like some of those fairy banquets depicted in an eastern tale than any thing in real life. Thousands and thousands, too, of wealthier classes, whose circumstances raised them above those who came to partake of his bounty, moved through the open spaces, enjoying the scene. The perron of the Hotel de Ville was crowded with guards, officers, and attendants, looking over the gay and happy sight which the square afforded; and above all rose the dark mass of the town-house, with a blaze of light flashing forth from all the open windows, while the sound of music from within, and the glancing of figures moving rapidly across the lights, offered links of interest between the feelings of the crowd without and the transactions that were passing in the building.

A knot of the more curious citizens had stationed themselves on the little rise by the fountain, and watched eagerly the windows of the hall where the banquet was just about to take place; and at length, when a loud flourish of trumpets echoed out upon the air, some of them were heard to exclaim, "Now! now they are coming to the tables! See, see! they are passing along. There is the Duke of Cleves; I know him by the limp in his gait; and there is the president,—there is the noble president! See how he overtops them all, and how his

plumes dance above the highest in the hall! Hurrah for the noble president!"—and the multitude, catching the sound, burst forth with a loud and universal cheer that made the buildings around echo and re-echo with the shout.

Although, at that distance, it was difficult to distinguish the persons within, yet the shout was not unappropriate; for it was indeed Albert Maurice, who—received as a guest by the states of Flanders, and the nobles and prime burghers of Ghent—was advancing to the seat prepared for him. Long consultations had been previously held in regard to where that seat was to be placed; for feudal states in general required that a marked distinction should be observed between nobles and citizens; but the druggist counselled the nobles to fool the young citizen's pride to the utmost for that one night. The example of Artevelte—a common tradesman of that very town, who had sat and treated with the highest princes of Europe—was cited, and prevailed; and the President of Ghent took his chair by the Duke of Cleves, with Ganay, by a previous arrangement, seated beside him.

The face of the druggist was uncommonly pale. He had marked the immense concourse of people in the square: he had marked the multitude of guards and attendants that crowded the terrace and thronged the halls of the town-house; and he knew the infinite perils that attended the deed he had undertaken to perform. Whatever course events might take, he felt that fate brooded heavily over the whole splendid scene; and his small, clear, dark eye wandered somewhat wildly round the hall, especially as, in following Albert Maurice towards the seat it had been arranged he was to occupy, the thundering shout of the multitude without burst upon his ear. All, however, passed in tranquil ease: the whole party were seated; and the attendants of the Duke of Cleves—somewhat more numerous than necessary—drew round the upper end of the table. But as they did so, they perceived that they enclosed among themselves two or three strange men, on whose intrusion they remonstrated somewhat roughly. What the others answered was not heard; but they kept their place, and the banquet proceeded.

Every thing was rich and splendid, according to the custom of that time; and many a fish and many a fowl

appeared upon the table which have either lost their palatable flavour in latter days, or have been discarded by some depravity of human taste. Albert Maurice ate sparingly, and drank little; but he was more gay and cheerful than, perhaps, any one had ever seen him before; and, with the whole, there was an air of easy dignity which left any outward difference that might be observed between himself and any of the nobles around entirely to his advantage.

Ganay drank deep; and as the banquet proceeded his cheek grew flushed and his eye sparkled more; but he was silent, absent, and thoughtful, and shrank when the eye of Albert Maurice rested on him even for a moment in conversation. At length the Duke of Cleves rose and addressed the druggist briefly, saying, "Master Ganay, you are an orator, and I am none; and, besides, as one of the consuls of the good town of Ghent, the task I am going to put upon you falls more naturally to you than to me. Fill, then, yon golden hanap to the brim, and express, if you can find language to do so, the gratitude and admiration which the states of Flanders—nobles and commons alike—feel for him who has won the first successes in arms for his native country against her base invaders,—successes which I trust may but be the earnest of many more."

Ganay took the large golden cup, and held it to an officer, who filled it with wine: but as the druggist again brought it back he leaned his hand upon the edge for a moment, and something was seen, by the eyes of more persons than one, to fall into the chalice. He rose, however, with greater composure than he had hitherto displayed through the evening; and with a happy flow of words, the very choiceness and selection of which made his speech seem far more vigorous and enthusiastic than it really was, he commented on the talents and successes of the young citizen, and thanked him, in the name of the town of Ghent and the states of Flanders, for the services he had rendered to his country.

It is scarcely necessary, perhaps, to state that it was the common custom of the day for a person publicly drinking to another in such a manner, to taste the wine himself, and then to send the cup to him whom he addressed. Ganay, accordingly, at the end of his oration, raised the hanap to his lips, and held it there for a moment; and then, according to form, gave it to the cup-

bearer, who presented it to the young burgher. Albert Maurice took the chalice, and then rose, while the eye of the druggist fixed upon him with a gaze that had something almost fearful in its very intensity.

"Noble lords," he said, in a clear, mellow, steady voice; "noble lords! dear fellow-citizens! worthy men of Flanders! you have been pleased this day to show me honours far higher than my poor merits gave me any title to expect. The duty of a citizen to his country is one which, however zealously executed, affords him no claim to thanks; for, being an obligation imposed on him by his birth, it binds him strictly through his life; and even at his death, he that has done all within his scope to uphold his native land has still done nothing but that which he was bound to do. Nevertheless, it is hard to say how much I rejoice that the men of Ghent and the states of Flanders have thought fit, by such distinguished honours, to reward such poor services as mine. Nor—however grateful to my heart may be your generous applause—are my feelings personal alone. I rejoice more that you have so honoured and rewarded the first man who has been enabled to render service in arms to the state, since her restoration to freedom, than that the first was Albert Maurice. I rejoice chiefly because I am sure that the distinction shown to me—unworthy as I am—this night, will be the means of calling others forth in the service of the country, whom diffidence of their own powers, or doubts of the state's willingness to accept what they may believe inefficient service, has hitherto kept back from the path of fame. When an individual serves his country to the utmost of his power, he does but his duty to that country, and no more; but when the state recompenses its individual servants even beyond their deserts, it does its duty to itself, and ensures the most zealous services of all its children: for the men who will serve a niggard master well, because it is their duty, will serve a liberal one with their whole heart and soul,—and, let me say, there is a mighty difference.—Men of Ghent," continued the young president, "and you noble barons and burghers of Flanders, I give you all deep and heartfelt thanks; and I drink unto you all!"

Albert Maurice had spoken calmly and collectedly, and not a word betrayed that there was one feeling in his heart but tranquil confidence. As he paused and

lifted the cup in his hand, the gaze of Ganay grew more and more intense, his pale lip quivered, and a bright red spot glowed on his ashy cheek, while the young citizen continued to raise the cup slowly towards his lip. Suddenly, however, Albert Maurice paused, and turned his glance with a movement as quick as light upon the druggist, into whose face the blood rushed with fearful violence as their eyes met. Sternly and steadfastly the young president gazed on him, while one might count fifty, and then tossing the cup into the midst of the hall, he exclaimed, with a scornful laugh, "No, no! No, no! Did you dream that I did not know you, murderer?"

"Know me now then!" cried Ganay, starting up—"know me now!" and he sprang towards Albert Maurice like a famished tiger. But at that moment the man who stood behind his chair strode forward; something bright waved above the druggist as he rose, descended at once upon his head, and cleft its way through to the very eyes. Ganay fell back from his place, dead, upon the floor of the hall; but even as he fell, his hand, armed with a short poniard, aimed an impotent blow at the young president, which struck ringing against the pavement.

"Ho! Close the doors!" cried Albert Maurice, rapidly. "Matthew Gournay, you have done well! Let no one dare to approach the corpse! Look at him as he lies, lords and free citizens! Look at him as he lies, with the weapon of destruction in his hand! And you, my friends, whom I stationed round about, did you not see him drop the poison in the cup as clearly as I did?"

"We did!—we did!—we did!" cried a dozen voices round the table; and those who were at first inclined to look somewhat fiercely upon these witnesses soon perceived that the testimony came from all the most honourable citizens of Ghent, who, forewarned, had watched the proceedings of the druggist.

"These are bold and terrible deeds, sir president!" said the Duke of Cleves.

"Not so bold as some I could name, Duke of Cleves!" replied Albert Maurice, bending his brows sternly upon him. "The man who lies before you has already more than one murder on his head. There are the proofs of his participation in the death of the good old Lord of Neufchatel, who died by poison while recovering from

his wounds. For these proofs I have to thank you worthy and fearless magistrate, Maître Pierre. These, however, would have been produced before the judges of this city, had I not discovered the purpose of this base assassin to poison me this night, and taken proper means to counteract his design. There are others here present, leagued in the same evil conspiracy; and did I so please, I could name them one by one. Look not to your attendants, Duke of Cleves; for know, that in this building and around it, I have enough faithful friends to bind every traitor present hand and foot, and give them over to the common hangman—did I so will it. But fear not; I neither accuse you nor absolve you, my lord. You came here a guest to the city of Ghent, and you depart unopposed, uninjured, with this warning only—beware how you entertain a thought against the liberties of the people. To the rest—within whose bosoms dwells the fearful consciousness of their own treachery—I say only, I do not dread them; and from my confidence in myself and in the people of Ghent, they find safety. Those who were moved to seek my overthrow by fears and doubts, instilled into them by yon arch traitor who now lies dead, will learn from my conduct this night that I am not the man that I have been represented; and those who, for baser reasons, would have compassed my death, may also learn that such designs fall ever, sooner or later, on the heads of those that framed them. Those who love me not, therefore, may depart in peace; those who love me and Ghent, remain; and let us finish our festivities, for the death of that base man is no more to be noted than the shooting of a wolf, or any other wild beast that would destroy us—Take away the corpse!"

The guests looked upon each other with inquiring glances, as they stood around the table in the same attitudes into which they had started, on the sudden catastrophe they had just witnessed; but few present were willing, by quitting the hall as the young president permitted, to brand themselves as enemies to Albert Maurice and to Ghent.

Good Martin Fruse was the first who resumed his seat, which he did, murmuring, "He was an unworthy man, that Ganay, and a disgrace to the city. He nearly caused my death some twenty years ago."

Those who heard this new charge against the un-

happy druggist started, and many looked wise, and shook the sagacious head, exclaiming, "Ah! we always knew he was a wicked man!" but Albert Maurice, who understood that the mode of death to which his uncle alluded was not quite deserving of such serious comment, again called upon those who were friends to Ghent, and to himself, to resume their seats at once.

One after another, all the citizens, and almost all the nobles, followed the example of good Martin Fruse. The Duke of Cleves, however, together with a few of his immediate partisans, remained standing; and after a brief pause, moved a step towards the door.

"It is not my custom," he said, "to sit and drink in halls where blood has just been shed; and without being an enemy to Ghent, or any of her true and faithful sons, I may be pardoned for quitting a place where I know not what is to happen next."

"Fortunately for myself, my lord," replied Albert Maurice, "I *did* know what was intended to happen next; though, perhaps, my having spoiled the design may be matter of offence to some here present. But, not to bandy words with so high a prince, I have only further to say, that the citizens of Ghent have been honoured by your presence while it has lasted; and you have, in return, been treated with a goodly and instructive, though somewhat fearful, spectacle—showing how the men of this city punish those who attempt to poison them at their solemn feasts. Make way for the Duke of Cleves, there!" And with an air in which courtesy and grace gave additional point to the keen scorn that curled his lip and bent his brow, Albert Maurice led the duke towards the door, and bowed low as he passed out.

The young president then resumed his seat; his lip softened, his brow unbent, and, gazing round the guests with one of those bland smiles which often win approbation for the past, by seeming certain of applause, he exclaimed, "Friends, have I done well?"

The man who rose to reply was one of the most zealous of that violent party on whose support Ganay had founded his authority; and Albert Maurice prepared for bold opposition; for he knew him to be fierce and fearless, though honest and upright in purpose. By one of those sudden revolutions of feeling, however, which are common in scenes of great excitement, the whole sen-

timents of the partisan had become changed by the frank and determined demeanour of the young citizen; and he answered at once, "So well have you done, sir president, that, in my opinion, if Ghent owed you gratitude before, that gratitude ought now to be increased a hundred-fold; and if she suspected you of any baseness, those suspicions should be done away for ever. To many of us you have been represented as courting the nobility for your own purposes, and seeking alone, in all you have done, your own aggrandizement. Some of us, too,—I for one," he added boldly,—"consented to your arrest this night. I acknowledge it; and frankly I acknowledge I was wrong. But believe me, sir president, when with the same voice I declare, that, had I ever dreamed of the scheme for murdering you here, my own knife should first have drunk the blood of the assassin. Justly has he been done to death; and wisely have you treated yon proud prince, who courts us now, only that he may first rise by us, and then crush us hereafter; and who—as no one that saw his countenance can doubt—was leagued with the dead assassin. It is the policy of those that hate us to set us at variance among ourselves, and remove from us all the men whose talents and whose firmness will enable us to triumph still. Let us, then, all pledge ourselves to union; and, in order to preserve him who alone possesses genius and power sufficient to lead us properly, let us give him a guard of five hundred men, and intrust him with greater authority than he has hitherto enjoyed."

The proposal was received with acclamation; and the citizens—some eager to show that they had no participation in the plot which had just been frustrated—some carried away by the general enthusiasm—and some from the first devoted to the young president—vied with each other in voting him new powers and new dignities. At that moment he might have commanded any thing in the power of the states of Flanders to bestow; and much more was spontaneously offered than he thought prudent to accept. "No, no!" he said; "limit the power you grant me to that which your fathers formerly conferred, in this very hall, on Jacob Von Artevelte, with this further restriction, that I shall submit, every month, the revenues intrusted to my disposal to the inspection of three persons chosen from your own body. Thus shall I be enabled to serve you as much as man can do;

and thus will you guard against those abuses to which the unlimited confidence of your ancestors gave rise. Nothing more will I accept."

The will of the young citizen for the time was law, and the whole arrangement was speedily completed. One more deep cup of red wine each man present quaffed to the health of Albert Maurice, and then took leave, one by one. Martin Fruse was the last that left him; and as he did so, the good old man wrung his hand hard. "Farewell, Albert," he said; "I have seen you a little child, and I have seen you a stately man, and I have loved you better than any thing else on earth throughout my life. You have now reached a dizzy height, my dear boy; and, oh! take care that your head do not turn giddy.—For my sake, if not for your own, take care; for it would slay me to see your fall."

CHAPTER XVII.

Few, but those who have passed through such scenes, and have felt the mighty strife of giant passions not only acting around them, but struggling in the narrow battle-field of their own bosoms, can at all comprehend what it is, after hours of contention, difficulty, and danger—where life and death hung upon a breath or movement—to find one's self alone and successful. If there be a feeling among the many which visit the human heart, in this dark and misty abode of mortal existence,—if there be a feeling among all those which, like angel or devil, visits the lonely sojourner in the wilderness of being, to raise him to the sky, or plunge him in the abyss,—if there be a feeling on earth that really deserves the name of sublime, it is the first calm sensation of dangers encountered and conquered, of mighty things endeavoured and achieved.

Albert Maurice sat alone, after an evening of such fearful excitement as few have ever passed upon this earth,—after having seen his own life, and power, and hopes in momentary danger,—and after having controlled and concealed his own passions, and bridled, and governed, and guided those of others,—after having

overthrown his enemies, slain his betrayer, secured his authority, and taken all but one small easy step to the very summit of his ambition. Oh, what a host of mingled sensations crowded rapidly on his heart! and how dizzily his brain whirled for the first few brief moments, while remembrance rapidly brought before him all the multiplied events of the last two hours; and out of the smoke of memory rose the giant consciousness that he was successful—triumphantly successful!

For an instant his lip curled with a proud and satisfied smile; and every thing was forgotten but that bright bubble—success. But, as he sat, a sort of lassitude came over him; his eye fell casually on the spot where the druggist Ganay had lain, convulsed in the agonies of death; and, by a caprice of the imagination, the same face which had then appeared streaked with ghastly blood, and contorted with the pangs of dissolution, was presented to his memory as he had seen it in former days, speaking the words of hope to his own ear, and cheering him on the path of enterprise and ambition. Touched by the magic wand of association, the splendid objects which he had just been contemplating began to change their form and lose their brightness. A dull weight of thought seemed to fall upon him, and his utmost efforts would not throw it off. It seemed as if some fiend, in bitter mockery, resolved to conjure up the faces of the dead, and to torture his heart with painful recollections, even in the hour of triumph. To the form of the druggist next succeeded, before the eye of fancy, that of the Duke of Gueldres, dying the green sward with his blood; and then, the shifting picture of the mind presented the same prince as when first, with buoyant joy, he came to thank him for his liberation. Next appeared Imbercourt and Hugonet, bending to the stroke of the executioner: and then, again, he saw them as they had appeared at the council, when he had been examined on the accusation of the prévôt; while the calm, grave, noble countenance of Imbercourt was seen, by imagination, pleading eagerly in exculpation of him, who had since worked out the death of his defender.

"So many, in so short a time!" thought Albert Maurice. "Yet have they died, each for his own misdeeds; and I have sacrificed them—ay, and with pain—for the good of my country alone!"—He almost started at the

vehemence with which conscience gave the lie to so base a delusion. "For the good of my country alone!" he thought again. "Nay—nay—nay—for my own ambition. What—what act have I done yet, for the good of my country *alone?* None, alas! none! and even now, perhaps,—even now, when ambition has swallowed up all—when I have reached the very pinnacle of success,—perhaps the only one I have suffered to escape—perhaps yon Duke of Cleves is even now plotting to deprive me of the only reward that can wipe away every evil memory, repay every effort, tranquillize every pain, and render success a blessing indeed. But he shall plot in vain; and if he dare to plot, by the Lord that lives, he shall die!"

"Ho! without there!" he continued aloud. "Bring me a hat and cloak! Oh, good Matthew Gournay—I had forgot," he added, as he saw who it was that answered his summons—"this very night your noble lord shall be set free. But I must see him myself; I have tidings for him which will glad his heart. You, too, shall not be forgotten; and though I know gold can never pay such services as yours, yet there are other means within my power. This very night we will set free your lord. In all the turbulence of the past evening, I had forgot what I should have remembered.—No, no, boy!"—he added to the page who brought him a high plumed bonnet and richly decorated cloak—"no, no! these vestments I have on are all too fine already. I would have something to conceal my rank—my station in the city I should say. Get me some servant's cloak and hat. Be quick! 'Tis nearly ten."

The president mused thoughtfully till the boy returned; and honest Matthew Gournay, seeing that deep and agitating thoughts were engrossing all his attention, stood quietly gazing on the spot where he had slain the unhappy Ganay, and wondering that any man should take the trouble of poisoning another, when he might rid himself of his enemy so easily by the dagger or the sword.

At length the hat and cloak were brought; and Albert Maurice drew the one round his person, and the other over his brow. "Now, Matthew Gournay," he said, "take five-and-twenty men, and bid them follow me by separate ways to the palace. There wait till I come. I will be in the square almost as soon as you; and after

I have spent some ten minutes in transacting business which admits of no delay, we will go on and liberate your good lord."

The ring which Matthew Gournay had received from his young lord acted with the magic effect of some talisman in an eastern tale: and whatever commands he received from Albert Maurice he obeyed at once, with unquestioning alacrity. The five-and-twenty men were soon summoned,—for the whole force of the free companions had been poured into the town of Ghent, during the evening, by means of the gate which, as we have seen, the followers of the president had secured on his first entering the city. A few brief words directed them by different ways to the palace; and—passing through the various crowds which had been gathered together for the entertainment in the square, and which were now discussing, in eager tones, the events that had taken place in the town-house—the men selected to accompany, or rather to follow, the young citizen, soon made their way to the gates of the palace.

That part of the town was nearly deserted, and the little square before the Cours du Prince was void and solitary, except where, nearly in the midst, a tall, dark figure, with its arms crossed upon its chest, stood gazing up at the building. All was quiet, and calm, and dark, along the façade of the palace, except where, here and there, from some of the long narrow windows, a stream of tremulous light broke out upon the night.

For several moments the figure continued to gaze, apparently fixing its glance earnestly upon one part of the building. But at length, perceiving the number of soldiers collecting before the gate, Albert Maurice, for he it was, who had outwalked all his followers, advanced, and, after speaking a few words to Matthew Gournay, demanded admission from the warder of the fortified gate. He gave his name and station, and urged business of importance as an excuse for the lateness of his visit. The warder replied in a tone of humble deference, which circumstances had compelled the proud soldiers of Burgundy to learn in speaking to the once contemned burghers of Ghent, telling him that he would willingly admit him, but that, as his orders had been very strict for the last week, he must detain him at the gate while he caused the princess to be informed of the fact.

Albert Maurice made no objection, and remained,

musing with a downcast countenance, across which the shadows of many emotions were passing, that he would not willingly have shown to the eye of open day. As calm and tranquil as a summer's morning, he had sat his horse in the midst of battle and conflict. Calmly, too, he had remained beside the man who was mixing a cup of poison for his lip, and preparing the dagger if the cup should fail. But now every nerve thrilled, and his heart beat faint like a coward's, though he was but about to meet a fair and gentle girl, whose fate might almost be said to rest in his own hands. He had hoped, and he had dreamed, through many a long day; and various circumstances had combined to give those hopes and dreams a tangible foundation and a definite form. But now that the moment approached when they were to be realized or destroyed for ever, they faded all away into fears and anxieties.

The warder returned and bowed low, while the gates were thown open. The soldiers within the court did military honours to the President of Ghent, and assuming a firmer step and a prouder air, Albert Maurice passed on within the precincts of the palace, followed by the train who had met him according to his appointment. At the entrance-hall his followers paused; and he himself, ushered forward by one of the domestic attendants of the princess, ascended the steps towards a smaller chamber, adjoining the great hall of audience.

In the anteroom he cast off his hat and cloak, and remained in the rich dress in which he had descended to the banquet in the town-house; and, as he passed on towards the door which the servant threw open, his eye fell upon a Venetian mirror, and perhaps he gained another ray of hope, from feeling that, in appearance as well as mind, he was not unfitted to move through those lordly halls, in the high station for which his ambition strove.

The chamber that he entered was but dimly lighted; and it was evident that the preparations for receiving him there had only been made upon the sudden announcement of his arrival. His eye, however, instantly rested upon Mary of Burgundy, as she sat surrounded by a number of her women; and the sweet smile with which she welcomed him so thrilled through his heart, that he felt the resolution which had brought him

thither shaken, lest, by seeking for deeper happiness, he should lose even the joy of that sweet smile itself.

"Welcome, my lord," she said—"most welcome back again to Ghent. For though we have had great joy from your victories and successes,—the first that have ever yet blessed our cause,—yet we have much needed your presence in the city."

"I hope, lady," replied the young citizen, with a tone of deep interest in all that concerned her immediate happiness—"I hope that you have suffered no personal annoyance; for, believe me, before I went, I took every means to guard you from the importunity of the Duke of Gueldres, or the intrusion of any one else."

"From the Duke of Gueldres," replied Mary, "who, I hear—unhappy man—has fallen in some of the late conflicts, I have, indeed, suffered nothing; nor have I truly to complain of any one else. Though my good cousin of Cleves does, perhaps, press me somewhat unkindly to a union, which is little less fearful in my eyes than the other. Doubtless, however, he deems it for my good, and strong are the reasons he urges; but having taken on myself to decide, and having told him that decision, I would fain be spared all further discussion."

The cheek of Albert Maurice reddened with anger; and he replied, "Fear not, dear lady; his importunities shall not press upon your grace much longer. The city of Ghent and the states of Flanders have this night armed me, thank God! with sufficient power to sweep —to—to—"

Albert Maurice paused and hesitated; for the bold and ambitious words that had been just springing to his lips he felt must not be rashly uttered in the ear of one whose love was to be gained and fixed, and whose hand —although it was the crowning object of all his ambition—though it was the motive for every energy and endeavour of his bosom,—would at once become vain and valueless, if unaccompanied by her heart.

He paused, and then continued,—"have armed me with sufficient power at once to guide the state, I trust, to permanent security and peace; and to sweep away from your domestic life every pain, anxiety, and fear."

The last words were spoken low and slowly; and as he pronounced them, he dropped his eyes to the ground; while the warm conscious blood rose up into his cheeks,

and spoke far more than his lips. The words he uttered, it is true, had no very definite meaning, and might be taken up in a very general sense; but the tone, the manner, the hesitation, the flushing of the cheek, the timid glance of the eye, gave emphasis and purpose to the whole. For the first time, a suspicion of what was passing in his bosom flashed across the mind of Mary of Burgundy, and inspired her, for the moment, with a feeling of terror which approached very nearly to despair. She turned deadly pale, and trembled violently, as, with rapid thought, she ran over the circumstances of her situation, and found how helpless she was if that suspicion were well founded. It was but for an instant, however, that she gave way to apprehension. From the first, she had appreciated the general character of Albert Maurice, especially its finer points, by a sort of instinctive comparison with her own. She knew that he was generous, high-spirited, noble-minded; and, though she might now find that her estimate of his ambition had been far below that which it should have been, yet she trusted to the better parts of his disposition to deliver her from the consequences of the worse. She knew that she was in his power. She felt that his will was law, in all the country that surrounded her; and that, if he chose, he could blast her hopes and happiness for ever. But, at the same time, she felt that there was some resource—though the only one—in the native generosity of his heart; and she determined to appeal to it boldly as her sole refuge from despair. It is true that a union with Albert Maurice, whose many splendid qualities she could not but acknowledge, might—were such feelings susceptible of any very marked shades of difference, and had it been possible for her to dream for one moment of such a union—have been less repugnant to her, than the marriages which had been proposed with the drivelling boy of France, with the coarse and brutal son of the Duke of Cleves, or with the cruel and unnatural Duke of Gueldres. But still the simple fact existed,—she loved another with all the deep sincerity of a woman's first affection, and the very thought of any other alliance was abhorrent to every feeling of her heart.

Nothing could have balanced those feelings in her bosom, but her strong sense of duty to the nation she was called upon to govern and protect. She could,

indeed, and would, have sacrificed every thing for her country and her people; but that people themselves had rejected the only alliance that could have benefited them; and, in the present instance, no such object could be gained by her marriage with the President of Ghent, as that which the French alliance might have accomplished, even could she have entertained the thought for one moment of bestowing the hand of the heiress of Burgundy on an adventurous and aspiring citizen,—a thought from which all Mary's feelings revolted, not the less strongly from the natural gentleness of her character. Had time for thought been added, the discovery or the suspicion of his love might have afforded a key to all the conduct of the young citizen, and, by showing to what deeds his passion had already betrayed him, might have increased a thousand-fold the terror of the unhappy princess; but, luckily, the consideration of her own situation, and of the means of averting the consequences she dreaded, engrossed her wholly, and thus guarded her from worse apprehensions.

The first effect of his speech, and of the sudden conviction that the manner, more than the words, produced, was, as we said, to turn her deadly pale; and, while a thousand new anxieties and painful considerations crossed her mind, she remained gazing on him so long, in silence, that she felt he must see that he was understood. The silence of her own embarrassment then becoming painful to her, as well as to him, the blood rushed up into her face, and yet she could not reply; so that both remained completely mute for several moments, after words had been spoken, which to the bystanders seemed perfectly simple.

At length she answered,—"Oh! sir president, if such power has been granted to you by the states, use it nobly, and Heaven will bless you."

"As far, lady, as my poor judgment can extend, I will use it nobly," replied Albert Maurice, over whose heart an icy chill had come, he knew not well why. "But," he added, "as I would fain use it for your happiness—believing it to be inseparable from that of the people—let me crave a few words with you in private, that I may ascertain more fully how that happiness may be best consulted."

He spoke slowly and calmly; but, from the quivering of his lip, it was evident that each word cost him a

painful struggle to pronounce. On the other hand, Mary was herself embarrassed by his request, which was not a little contrary to the etiquette of her situation; and yet he who requested, she knew, might command; and she felt that, perhaps, it might be better for both that they should be alone. After a moment's pause, then, she gave the necessary order for her attendants to withdraw into the antechamber, and then resumed her seat. Albert Maurice stood beside her, with his eyes still bent upon the ground; and for a moment, even after the last of the princess's suite had quitted the chamber, he remained silent, striving to master all the emotions which were agitating his heart. It was a painful struggle, but at length he succeeded; and then raising his head with some degree of proud consciousness in his aspect, he looked calmly on the princess.

"Madam," he said, in a firmer voice than he had hitherto commanded, "your general welfare, and that of your people, is undoubtedly one great, and ought to be one paramount, object with me in all I strive for; but, at the same time, believe me—oh, believe me!—that your individual happiness is no less a deep and overpowering consideration in my mind. Lady, I know, and feel painfully, that the great difference of rank and station between us may prevent you from conceiving fully how dear your interests are to me. Nay, turn not pale, madam!"—he added, with watchful and somewhat irritable pride, softened by deep and sincere affection—"nay, turn not pale! No word shall you hear from my lips that may offend your ear or wound your heart. Lady, the ambitious misproud citizen may have as elevated—perhaps more devoted—ideas of true affection, than the noble, whose pride and arrogance are his right of birth; and may be able to crush his own heart, to sacrifice more than life—hope, blessed hope itself—to serve the being that he loves. Nay, do you weep?" he continued, seeing the tears roll rapidly over the fair cheek of Mary of Burgundy. "Nay, do you weep? Then I have said too much. Yet, hear me a little. I see you agitated—far more agitated than any thing which has passed hitherto should have occasioned, unless the words we have spoken, whose import seems but small, may have touched some fine strung cord within your heart, and made sadder music than I dreamed of. However, in this land of Flanders I have now no small

power—which may last God knows how long. But fear not that the power I do possess will ever be used to thwart one wish of your heart. Whatever it may cost me, it shall be employed to serve you with deep and true attachment. There is—there is," he added, his emotion almost mastering his calmness—"there is one question I would ask, which is hard to put, and may be painful to answer. Yet, let me speak it quickly and briefly, lest I should fail."

He paused for a moment, and looked down; while his hand became clenched fearfully tight, as if in the struggle to suppress some deep feelings that would fain have burst forth; but after a single moment all was again vanquished, and he proceeded: "Some months have now passed since your father's eyes were closed in death; your dominions are invaded, your people are distracted by different parties, and your nobles are leaguing together to snatch one from another the blessing of your hand. It is time, lady, that you should make a choice; and although I know no one on all the earth that is worthy of the happiness within your gift, yet, if there be any one to whom you can give your heart, I will—I will,—yes!" he added more firmly, "I will do all that mortal man can do to render you happy in your love!"

He paused; and although an undefinable something in the conduct and demeanour of Mary of Burgundy through that night had already shown him that one-half of his dreams were dreams indeed; yet hope—persevering hope—lingered still, and told him, "if she love none else, she may still be thine."

Mary of Burgundy's conduct was already determined; but she still trembled in every limb; and long, long was it ere she could reply. At length she answered,—"You have, indeed, put to me a question which makes me feel most painfully how different is the station of princess from the happy and modest retirement of private life. Nay, do not think I blame you, sir,—I blame but my hard fate. You are most kind; and, amid a base and interested crowd, who would fain make me the slave of their wild ambitions, I shall ever remember you with gratitude, as the only one who,—who—with more power than all the rest to command my fate, was willing to cast self away, and—and to seek my happiness alone. Feeling thus,—believing from my heart that in your generous nature I may perfectly rely,—I

answer your question as distinctly as it is put. There is, I believe, upon the face of the earth but one man to whom I can conscientiously give my hand. 'Tis now near two years ago that, by my father's command, I plighted my faith in writing, and pledged thereto a ring, to one whom I had been taught, during some months of happy intimacy, to look upon as my future lord:—Maximilian, Archduke of Austria—"

"And you love him! and you love him!" cried Albert Maurice, starting forward, and, forgetful of all restraint, grasping her firmly by the wrist. The princess started up alarmed, and a cry of terror at his sudden vehemence had nearly passed her lips. But she stifled it ere it was uttered; and the next moment Albert Maurice had recovered himself, and was kneeling at her feet.

"Pardon me! pardon me, Princess of Burgundy!" he said. "Give me—oh, give me your forgiveness! The dream is gone! the vision is over! and Albert Maurice, the humblest of your subjects, is ready to pour out his blood to atone for all that he has done amiss. Madam," he added, rising, "I have been living in a dream; and, I fear me, when I come to look upon it steadily I shall find it a sad one. But no more of that: at present I am—if that be not a dream also—president of the states general of Flanders, and armed with greater power than any other man in the land. What can I do to sweep all obstacles from before your wishes? Tell me quickly how I can serve you? Let me, at least, work out your happiness, before the memory of the past turn my brain."

"Oh, speak not so wildly, sir," cried Mary. "You have great powers and noble energies, which will guide you to the height of fame; and yet, I trust, to the height of happiness. Indeed, sir, I cannot speak further, while you seem so moved."

"Madam, I am perfectly calm," replied Albert Maurice. "Those energies and those powers your grace is pleased to speak of may last a longer or a shorter time, according to God's will; and I am most anxious to wipe out any offence I may have committed, by employing them vigorously in your service. Let me beseech you to speak. Shall I send off immediate messengers to the archduke?"

"No, no! Oh, no!" cried Mary; "I fear too much has been done already of that kind, by my kind step-

dame, the Duchess Margaret and my good cousin of Ravestein; for I hear—for I hear—that the archduke is already on his way to Brussels."

"Ha!" cried Albert Maurice; "ha!"—but he said no more, and the princess proceeded.

"Yet, sir," she said, "I have many fears; for I know that the Duke of Cleves has not only sent forth messengers to forbid his approach to the city, but, also, I hear from my dear friend and foster-sister, Alice of Imbercourt, who is now with the good Lord of Hannut, that a hundred men, bearing the colours of the house of Cleves, have passed through Brussels; and there is reason to believe they waylay the road from the Rhine."

"Indeed! This must be seen to!" said the young citizen, in the same abstracted manner. "But your grace was about to add—"

"Merely this, sir," replied Mary, with that calm impressive gentleness that is more touching than any vehemence; "that the man to whom I believe myself plighted by every tie but the final sanction of the church, is, I am told, on his road hitherward, slenderly accompanied,—for the avarice of the emperor is well known, and his son now journeys with hardly ten attendants. He has enemies,—strong enemies on the way,—and I leave you to judge, sir, of the feelings that I experience."

The lip of Albert Maurice quivered; but he still retained command over himself, and replied in a low but distinct voice, though, in every tone, the vehement struggle he maintained to master the agony of his heart was still apparent:—"To calm those feelings, madam, shall be my first effort; and, as I have received timely information, entertain not the slightest apprehension of the result. I will serve you, madam, more devotedly than I would serve myself; and the last energies that, possibly, I may ever be able to command, shall be directed to secure your happiness. I have now detained you long. Night wears, and time is precious. I humbly take my leave. May Heaven bless you, madam! May Heaven bless you! and send you happier days, to shine upon your reign, than those with which it has begun."

He bowed low, and took two or three steps towards the door, while Mary gazed upon him with eyes in which compassion for all she saw that he suffered, and woman's invariable sympathy with love, called up an unwilling

tear. "Stay, sir, one moment," she said at length; "it may be the last time that ever I shall have the power to thank you, as Duchess of Burgundy, before I resign my sovereignty with my hand to another. Believe me, then, that as far as the gratitude of a princess towards a subject can extend, I am grateful to you for all that you have done in my behalf. Believe me, too, that I admire and esteem the great qualities of your mind, and that I will, as far as in me lies, teach my husband"—and she laid a stress upon the word—"to appreciate your talents and your virtues, and to honour and employ them for our common benefit. Take this jewel, I beseech you," she added, "and wear it ever as a token of my gratitude."

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Albert Maurice, as he advanced to receive the diamond she proffered. He took it slowly and reverentially; but as her hand resigned it his feelings overpowered him, and pressing the jewel suddenly to his heart, he exclaimed, "I will carry it to my grave!" Then turning, without further adieu, he threw open the door and quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PAINFUL and terrific as had been the struggle in the bosom of Albert Maurice, while he remained in the presence of the princess, his feelings had been light and sunshiny, compared with those which he experienced when he found himself alone with the deep gloom—the dull immoveable despair which at once took possession of his heart, the moment that thought had an opportunity to rest upon his own situation. We have before seen that remorse was already busy in his bosom; and the only shield that guarded him from the lash of his own reflections had been the bright surpassing hope of overcoming all the mighty obstacles before him, and winning her he loved. But now he had triumphed over every enemy—he had overleaped every barrier—he had set his foot upon every obstacle, and, in the end, discovered that she loved another—that all was useless that he had done—that the blood he had shed had been shed

in vain—that he had forgotten his country and her rights—that he had forgotten justice and humanity—that he had yielded himself entirely to ambition, and consigned himself to remorse for ever—for a dream that was gone. Nor was this all; the same deep, fiery, passionate love remained in his heart, but was now doomed, instead of the bright follower of hope, to become the sad companion of remorse and despair. When he thought of the future,—when she should become the bride of another,—he felt his brain reel under the agony of that contemplation; when he thought of the past, he felt that the gnawing worm was for ever destined to prey upon his heart. There was no refuge for him in all time, to which he could fly for relief. The gone hours were full of reproach, and the approaching ones were all bitterness.

Such were his feelings as he strode along the passages of the palace at Ghent; and the incoherent words that he muttered to himself, as he proceeded, showed how terrible had been their effect already upon his bright and powerful mind. "They have been murdered in vain," —he muttered,—"they have been murdered in vain. Their blood cries up to heaven against me. To see her in the arms of another—Oh, God! oh, God! But she shall be happy. Yes—she shall be happy. I will provide for his safety, as a brother—and she shall be happy; and I—and I—why, there is the grave—that is one resource, at least!" and suddenly he burst into a low, involuntary laugh, which made him start even as it rang upon his own ear. "Am I insane?" he thought; "then I must be speedy, lest the power fail me." And again muttering disjointed sentences, he proceeded down the great staircase, and was passing through the entrance-hall, without noticing any one, when Matthew Gournay advanced to his side and stopped him.

"There is no time to be lost, sir," he said; "let us hasten quick."

"Who are you?" demanded Albert Maurice, gazing vacantly upon him. "Who are you?—Oh, yes! I had forgot," he added, recalling his thoughts. "Other things were pressing on my mind. We will go presently, but I must first return to the town-house; and yet that square—I love not to pass that square, where they were beheaded."

"You have no time, sir," replied the old soldier, in a

tone which again recalled Albert Maurice to the present moment. "As I sat here but now, that evil prévôt—that Maillotin du Bac—passed through the hall, with several others, speaking eagerly of you. His eye fell upon me, and he may chance to know me well. At all events, he was silent instantly; but, if I am not very wrong indeed, he has taken his way towards the prison, where my young lord lies; and perchance, if we be not quick, we may come too late."

"You speak true—lead on," cried Albert Maurice, roused to the exertion of all his powers by the sudden call upon his energy. "You, young man, run as for your life to the town-house! Bid the commander of the burgher guard march a hundred men instantly down to the prévôt's prison, near the gates. But who have we here?" he added, as a man in breathless haste ran up the steps into the hall. "The lieutenant of the prévôt, as I live! How now, sir, whom seek you?"

"You, sir president," replied the man, at once. "You once saved me when I was in imminent peril; and I now think that the news I bring you may be valuable to you. The prisoner who was made in the market-place,—the Vert Gallant of Hannut,—men say you owe him something, and would fain repay it. But, if you hasten not your steps, you will come too late. I have done what I could to delay the prévôt, but he is now speeding on to the prison. His purpose is against the life of the prisoner; and his horses are ready to fly from Ghent for ever."

"Enough, enough!" said Albert Maurice, passing him suddenly, and springing down the steps of the palace. The court was soon traversed, and the streets leading towards the gate were threaded by the young citizen and his followers with the speed of light. The active exertion of his corporeal powers seemed to give back to Albert Maurice full command of his mental ones, at least for the time; and though his thoughts were characterized by the darkest and sternest despair, they wandered not from those points to which he strove to bend them, and he seemed revolving eagerly some plan of future conduct. "Yes," he said, half-aloud, as he strode on,—"yes! so shall it be,—so shall it be! If I am in time, he shall conduct the rest; and, ere all be finished, the world may have cause to know that there were some drops of Roman blood even within this bosom."

Almost as he spoke he turned the corner of a street which led into one of those conducting directly towards the Alost gate. Fifty yards farther from the town walls than the point at which the narrow street he had been pursuing entered the other, stood a small stone building, with a few narrow slits in the masonry for windows, known as the prévôt's prison, in which he lodged any newly-arrested prisoners, previous either to their immediate execution or to their removal to some other place of confinement. The street was all dark, and likewise solitary, except where, under the projection of a house—the upper stories of which, as was often customary in Ghent, protruded considerably beyond the lower ones—stood four or five men, holding saddled horses, and conversing together in a low tone.

The impatient stamping of their steeds had prevented them from catching the approaching steps of Albert Maurice and his party; and one was saying to the other, at the very moment they came up, in a tone sufficiently loud for his words to be distinguished,—"He is very long! I never knew him so long about such a job before!"

"Let them be seized," exclaimed Albert Maurice, the instant his eye fell upon them; "the rest follow me;" and without waiting to notice the short scuffle that ensued, he sprang on towards the prévôt's prison, and pushed against the door. It was locked from within, and his effort to open it was vain. "Fly to the gate," he exclaimed, turning to one of his followers: "bring me a battle-axe from the guard-house. Ho! within there," he added, striking the hilt of his sword violently against the door. "Open the door! beware what you do; you cannot escape me; and you shall find my vengeance terrible. Open the door, I say!"

But he spoke in vain: no answer was returned; and the only sound that he even thought he heard was that of a low groan. After a few moments of painful expectation, the man who had been sent to the gate returned, bearing a ponderous axe, and followed by two or three of the soldiers of the guard.

Albert Maurice snatched the weapon from his hands, and in three blows dashed in a large part of the door. The rest was soon hewn down, at least sufficiently to admit the passage of the young burgher and his followers. Entering the small stone hall into which it

opened, he caught up a light that had evidently been burning some time untrimmed; and, commanding two or three of those who accompanied him to guard the door, he strode forward rapidly to the mouth of a narrow flight of steps, which led to some cells below the ground. At the entrance of one of these dungeons a lantern had been placed upon the ground, and was still burning; and Albert Maurice immediately perceived that the door was not completely closed. He instantly pushed it open, and held up the light, when the sight that presented itself to his eyes was horrible indeed, but not ungrateful.

Seated upon the side of the straw pallet, which had been his only couch since he had been removed from the town-house, appeared Hugh de Mortmar, as we have previously called him, while his right foot was pressed heavily upon the body of a man, who, from his dress and appearance, seemed to be one of the jailers in the employ of the prévôt. A little to the right, surrounded by a pool of blood,—a stream of which was still flowing from his throat,—lay the form of Maillotin du Bac, while the poniard, which, it may be remembered, Albert Maurice had bestowed upon Hugh de Mortmar in the prison of the town-house, now driven tightly in between the gorget plaits and cuirass of the prévôt's armour, showed at once the manner of his death, and the arm which had inflicted it.

The young prisoner held in his hand the sword of the dead man, and gazed upon those who entered with a firm and resolute countenance, while he pressed down beneath his feet the form of the jailer, who was clearly alive, and seemingly uninjured, except from a ghastly contusion on his forehead. The moment that he beheld who it was that entered, Hugh de Mortmar started up, and a few and hurried words explained the precise situation in which they all stood. The sight of Albert Maurice and of good old Matthew Gournay was enough to satisfy the young prisoner; and on his part he had only to tell them, that while lying there a few minutes before, thinking of when his captivity might end, he had heard approaching steps, and listened to a low conversation at the door, which he felt sure boded him no good. Affecting still to sleep, he remained perfectly quiet while the door was opened, and the prévôt, setting down his lantern on the outside, approached towards him, accom-

panied by the jailer who had the care of the prison. Their eyes, however, were not so much accustomed to the darkness as his own; and seeing evidently that the design of the prévôt was to despatch him, he watched his moment till the other was stooping over him, and then drove the dagger with which he had been furnished, with the full force of recovered health and strength, under the gorget of the murderer. So hard had he stricken it, however, between the iron plates, that he could not draw it forth again, and he had nothing to trust to but his own corporeal strength in the struggle which succeeded with the jailer.

The hard food and the constrained repose, however, to which he had been subjected in the prison, had perhaps contributed to restore him to full vigour in a shorter time than might otherwise have been required for recovering his health; and the jailer, overmatched, had just been cast headlong to the ground when Albert Maurice forced his way into the place of the young noble's confinement.

In the energy of action Albert Maurice had, for the time, found relief from a part of the heavy load that passion and circumstances had piled upon his head; but the moment the necessity of active exertion passed away, the weight returned and crushed him to the earth. He spoke for an instant to the prisoner collectedly and calmly, but gradually his brow grew dark and clouded; and his words became low, harsh, and confined to those necessary to express his wishes or commands.

The jailer, freed from the tread of Hugh de Mortmar, was placed in the custody of some of those who had now crowded to the spot; and the president, after giving general orders to the burgher guard which came up, and a few whispered directions to Matthew Gournay, took the prisoner by the hand, saying, "Come, my lord; let us to the town-house!"

The change which had come over the whole demeanour of the young citizen since last he had seen him was too great to escape the eyes of Hugh de Mortmar, even at a moment when the excitement of a late struggle was fresh upon him. Nor did he exactly understand how the young president dared to take the bold step of setting him free at once, when he had before seemed most anxious to proceed with scrupulous caution. He made no observation, however, and followed Albert Maurice into

the street. By this time, almost all the respectable citizens of Ghent were in their quiet beds; but a number of those who had been entertained in the market-place were still wandering about; some partially inebriated with ale or mead; some half-drunk with excitement and pleasure. A number of these had gathered together among the guards and attendants, now collected round the door of the prison; and as Albert Maurice led forth his companion, and the flickering glare of a number of lanterns and torches showed the features of the president to the crowd, he was greeted by loud acclamations.

But the smile of bitterness and scorn with which Albert Maurice now heard the vivats of the multitude contrasted strongly with his demeanour in the morning, and showed how completely the talismanic touch of disappointment had changed to his eyes all the fairy splendours of his fate.

Without a word of reply, he passed through the midst of the crowd, sought the narrowest and darkest way; and, apparently buried in sad thoughts, proceeded with a quick and irregular step towards the town-house, maintaining a gloomy and unbroken silence as he went. He avoided the market-place before the building as much as possible; and the only words he spoke were uttered when he could not avoid seeing the spot where Imbercourt and Hugonet had died, and which was now covered with people, busily removing the traces of the evening's festivity. "It is sad," he said, with a mournful shake of the head; "it is sad!" Then turning into the town-house, he ascended the stairs rapidly, and entered a small withdrawing-room by the side of the great hall.

To that very chamber it so happened that the body of Ganay had been removed, after the sword of Matthew Gournay had left him lifeless on the pavement; and the first object that met the eye of Albert Maurice was the corpse stretched upon a table, while one of his own attendants stood near, as if he had been examining the appearance of the dead man. The first impulse of the president was to draw back; but the next was the very contrary; and, again advancing, he approached directly to the table, and fixed his eyes upon the face of the corpse, which was uncovered. "He sleeps calm enough!" he said, drawing in his lips, and turning par-

tially to Hugh de Mortmar. "He sleeps calm enough, with all his burning passions at an end. But this is no place for what we have to say."

He was then treading back his steps towards the door, when the attendant advanced, and gave him a packet of papers and a small silver box, saying, "These old papers, sir, and this box, which we conceive to contain poison, are all that we have discovered on the dead body."

"Ha! will the means of death lie in so small a space," said Albert Maurice, gazing on the little silver case; "but 'tis well! Bring hence the lights, leave the body, and lock the door. He will not find solitude oppressive, I doubt not;" and thus saying, he led the way into another chamber, to which the servant followed with the key and lights; and the president added further, as they were set down before him, "Bring wine!"

When the man was gone, and he was seated with the young cavalier, he leaned his brow upon his hand for a moment, and then looked up,—"Give me your pardon, sir," he said; "give me your pardon for a short space. I am somewhat ill to-night, and must collect my thoughts before I can speak to you as I ought."

Hugh de Mortmar bowed his head; and wine being brought in a few minutes, Albert Maurice filled for both, and drained his own cup to the dregs. "I have a burning thirst upon me," he said, "but it will soon be quenched. Now, sir, I can speak. You have recovered, I trust, your full strength; and this night—that is to say, ere dawn—can ride forth away from the thraldom of this place?"

"As well as ere I rode in life," replied Hugh de Mortmar, "and thank you deeply for your kind intentions."

"Th[illegible]not me," replied Albert Maurice, gravely, "for I am about—like a true citizen—" he added, with a bitter smile, "for I am about to drive a hard bargain with you; and to make you agree to do me a service in return,—not for giving you your liberty, for you did the like to me—but for some intelligence I have to communicate, which may be worth its weight in gold. Of that hereafter. First, let us speak of the service I require. You have at this moment, within the walls of the city, where I have given them employment during this evening, some three or four hundred free companions—good soldiers, levied for purposes I know and respect. In

an hour's time they will be mounted, and at the Alost gate, from which we have just come. You shall have arms that might grace a prince, a horse as noble as ever was bestrode by knight; and what I require is this,—that, all other matter laid aside, you ride forward towards Brussels, and thence onward, on whatever road you may find necessary,—as you will there discover from the Lord of Ravestein, or the duchess-dowager,—in order to meet Maximilian, Archduke of Austria."

"What! my best friend and old companion in arms!" cried Hugh de Mortmar. "No evil against him, sir president! for know, I would sooner bear to my grave the heaviest chains that ever shackled man, than raise an arm against one I love so well!"

"Fear not, my lord!" replied Albert Maurice. "For his safety, not for his injury, would I have you set out. Tell him from me, Albert Maurice, that his way is beset,—tell him that every artifice will be used to make him turn back, by fair means or by foul. But bid him hasten forward, in spite of all; and you, on your part, promise me never to quit him, till you see him safely within the gates of the duke's house in Ghent."

"Willingly! most willingly!" replied the young cavalier, rising. "I am ready to set out!"

"What, without the tidings I have promised?" demanded Albert Maurice.

"Some other time!" replied Hugh de Mortmar.—"When I return will do."

"The present moment is yours," answered the young citizen, gravely. "Who can say that, by the time you return, these lips may not be closed by a seal that no human hand can ever remove?"

"I trust not," replied the other; "I trust not; but if what you have to tell be really of importance, let me beseech you to speak it quickly."

"I will," replied Albert Maurice. "I have no right, nor any wish, to keep you in suspense. Are you aware that Adolphus Duke of Gueldres is dead?"

"Good God!" exclaimed the young cavalier. "They told me that he was quite well, and leading the forces of Ghent against Tournay. You have, indeed, ended my suspense somewhat abruptly."

"There is still more to come," said Albert Maurice, with a sort of reckless harshness, which was no part of his natural character; but which probably arose from

the apathetic callousness of despair. "As you knew not that he was dead, you know not that this arm slew him."

"Ha!" cried the other, instinctively laying his hand upon his side, as if to grasp the hilt of his sword. "You—you! Did you shed my father's blood!—Then, take heed to yourself. Call again for your jailers! Cast me back into the dungeon; for otherwise your blood must answer for that which you have spilt."

"Such threats," answered Albert Maurice, "are worse than vain, to one who loves life too little to care who takes it from him. Besides, they are prompted by a mere dream of the imagination, which I can dissolve in two or three words. You had never seen the Duke of Gueldres from your childhood; no sweet reciprocations of domestic love had bound your heart to his; you knew that he was vicious, criminal, unfeeling.—Nay, frown not, sir, but hear me.—You know all this; and yet, because you believe him to have been your father, you would slay any one that raised a hand against him."

Doubtless, there is inherent in human misery a desire of seeing others wretched when we are wretched ourselves; and the sort of painful playing with the feelings of the young cavalier, in which Albert Maurice indulged at a moment when he himself was plunged in the gloomiest despair, probably arose from some such cause. His own griefs, however, were too great to suffer his mind to dwell long upon any thing without weariness; and he tired almost instantly of the topic.

"Too much of this!" he added, in the same abrupt tone. "Be your feelings on those points rational or not, no tie, human or divine, binds you to love or to avenge Adolphus, the bad Duke of Gueldres. Know, that at his instigation the man whose corpse you saw but now, kindled the flames of Lindenmar, in which the infant heir of Hannut was supposed to have perished: and further know, that in the act of death, the Duke of Gueldres confessed to me that he himself carried away the infant, and reared him as his son upon the death of his own child. You will want other proofs to establish the facts—there they are, in writing; and probably these papers which you saw me receive but now may throw some further light upon the matter.

We have neither of us time to examine them more particularly at present. Take them with you, and claim your right of birth. Now follow me to the armory, for I hear your band passing onward towards the Alost gate to wait your coming. Are you strong enough to go!"

The young cavalier gazed for a moment in his face, bewildered by all he heard; but then replied, "I am ready! quite ready! For these papers I owe you a thousand thanks; but the tidings you have given confound me, and I have not words—"

"No more, no more!" replied Albert Maurice.—"Here is our way."

The young citizen now led his companion forward to the armory, which had been collected in the town-house under his own care. As they went, the liberated prisoner would fain have asked a thousand questions explanatory of the strange tidings he had just received; but the answers of Albert Maurice were brief, and somewhat sharp. Referring him entirely to the papers that he had received, the young citizen strode onward, and saw the Vert Gallant of Hannut equip himself once more in a complete suit of arms. There was a degree of joy in the countenance of the young heir of Hannut as he did so,—a sort of new lighting up of that military hope which was the great inspiration of the day,—that called a melancholy smile even to the lip of Albert Maurice; and he gazed upon him, as with quick and dexterous hands he clothed his powerful limbs in steel, as an old man on the verge of the tomb might be supposed to regard a youth setting out upon the flowery path of life, full of all those bright hopes that had passed away from himself for ever.

When it was all done,—"Your horse," said the young citizen, "stands below; but yet one moment. A pass must be written for yourself and the archduke. Follow me once more."

In the next chamber were implements for writing; and, with a rapid hand, Albert Maurice traced the necessary order, destined to remove all petty obstacles from the path of his princely rival, signed his name below in a bold free hand, and gave it to his companion with a proud, but bitter smile.

"There," he said; "take it, and go forth! and may God speed you on your errand. Forgive me if I have

sported with your feelings this night,—which maybe I have done in some degree,—but there is a potent demon in my heart just now, that strives hard to crush each noble wish and kindly feeling, ere they can rise. Now, farewell!"

"Farewell! farewell!" replied Hugh of Hannut. "I may, perhaps, want more information than these papers contain. But we shall meet again!"

"Perhaps we may," replied Albert Maurice, as the other turned, and descended the steps. "Perhaps we may," he repeated, as, after a moment's pause, he heard the trampling of horse, announcing that the other had departed. "Perhaps we may, in the grave, or rather, beyond it."

The young president then returned to the chamber in which he had been sitting, and continued for about an hour engaged in writing. When he had concluded, he buried his eyes in his hands for a few moments, and remained plunged in deep thought. Rousing himself, he raised a lamp, and striding across the passages to the room where the corpse of Ganay the druggist lay, he threw open the door, and gazed upon the countenance of the dead man for some time.

Without a word, he then walked back to the chamber where he had been writing; and drawing forth the small silver box that had been given him, poured the white powder that it contained into one of the cups, added a little wine from the tankard, and drank off the mixture. After which he cast himself in a chair, and closed his eyes.

For several minutes he remained in the same position, without a muscle of his face being moved; but at length he opened his eyes, looking somewhat fiercely round the chamber.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed aloud. "It has no effect! and I lie here, expecting death without a chance of his approach, while the past haunts me; and there seem voices crying up for judgment upon me, from yon accursed square. But I will soon end all!" and starting up, he drew his dagger from the sheath; but as he did so, something in the word judgment appeared to seize upon his imagination. "Judgment!" he said—"judgment! Am I not flying to judgment!" and laying down the dagger on the table, he paused, gazing round with a degree of fearful bewilderment in his eyes, which

seemed to show either that his mind was shaken, or that some potent destroyer was mastering the body. "Judgment!" he repeated. "Were it not better to wait till I am summoned,—to strive to wipe out the evil,—and to bear the sorrows that God has given as a punishment for all that I have done, and left undone? Judgment! judgment!" But, as he repeated that awful word, his cheek grew deathly pale; cold drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead; his lips became nearly livid; and the rich curls of his dark hair, as if relaxed by the overpowering weakness that seemed coming over his whole frame, fell wild and floating upon his brow.

At first, apparently unconscious of the change that was taking place, he leaned his hand upon the table to steady himself as he stood; but the moment after, two or three sharp shudders passed over his whole frame; and after reeling painfully for an instant, he cast himself back into the chair, exclaiming, in a tone full of despair indeed, "It is too late! it is too late!" and he threw himself to and fro in restless agony.

"This is in vain!" he cried at length, opening his eyes. "This is weak, and empty, and cowardly! I that have lived boldly can surely die as I have lived;" and once more resuming the attitude in which he had placed himself at first, he clasped his hand tight over his eyes as if to exclude a painful sense of the light. In a moment or two the hand dropped; but his eyes remained closed; and after a time, the exhausted lamps, which had now been burning many hours, went out, and all was darkness!

CHAPTER XI.

THE rumour which had given to the heart of Mary of Burgundy the glad hope that Maximilian of Austria was already within her territories had deceived her; and Hugh of Hannut, on arriving at Brussels, found that his princely companion-in-arms was still far from that city. True to the promise he had given, however,—though all his own feelings would have conducted him at once to the forest of Hannut, wherein he had led a life of such

adventure and interest, and to the mansion where she he loved now dwelt, and in which his happiest days had been passed—he advanced directly towards Cologne; and not far on the hither side of the Rhine met the small party which accompanied the son of the emperor. It were as tedious as an old chronicle to tell the joy of Maximilian at the coming of his friend, or to detail all the efforts that were made by the Duke of Cleves to deter or prevent the archduke from pursuing his journey towards Ghent. The private information he had received, and the armed force which now accompanied him on his way, rendered all efforts either to alarm or impede him vain; and the rapid progress made by the French arms had so convinced the people of Flanders that a single leader, whose fortunes were linked for ever to that of the Princess of Burgundy, was absolutely necessary to give vigour and direction to their efforts, that all attempts to stir them up to oppose the alliance with the Austrian prince would have been fruitless under any circumstances.

One event, however, had happened, in the mean time, which completely cooled throughout Flanders that ardour for innovation, and that desire of democratic rule, which is one of the evils consequent upon every struggle for increased liberty, whether just or unjust—the wild spray which the waves of freedom cast beyond their legitimate bound.

The morning after the return of Albert Maurice to Ghent, some of his attendants, finding the door of his bed-chamber open, entered, and discovered that he had never been in bed; and the alarm spreading, he was soon after found, seated in the chair in which he had been writing, cold, stiff, and dead.

Of the letters which were cast upon the table before him, one was addressed to the princess, and one to his uncle; and both distinctly alluded to his intention of destroying himself. Left suddenly without a leader, pressed by a powerful enemy, and encumbered with the management of a state, all the springs and wheels of which they themselves had disarranged, the people of Ghent began to ask themselves what they had gained by pressing exaction and discontent beyond the mere recovery of their rights and privileges. The simplest among them saw that they had gained nothing, and lost much; and the more clear-sighted discovered, that in

carrying their efforts beyond the straightforward object which they had proposed at first, they had only made the government of the state an object of contention to bold and ambitious party leaders,—a race of men who, for the purpose of success, must always necessarily prolong that confusion and anarchy which is more baleful than the worst of tyrannies; and who, when success is obtained, must end in tyranny to uphold their power.

The very day that the death of Albert Maurice was discovered, intelligence arrived that the armies of France, marching on from the side of Cassel, had burned some villages within four leagues of Ghent; and the council of the states, confused, terrified, and surprised, without chief, without union, and without resource, proceeded in a body to the palace; and resigning at the feet of the princess the authority they had usurped, demanded her orders and directions, in the imminent peril to which the state was exposed. It was then that Mary of Burgundy made that famous answer, which has been transmitted to us by almost every historian who has mentioned her name; but it was in sorrow, not in anger, that she spoke; and the tears were in her eyes, when—after hearing the details of a ruined country, an invaded territory, the rich harvests of Flanders reaped by strange husbandmen while they were green, her frontier fortresses taken, and her troops proving false—she replied to the subjects whose turbulence and discontent had fostered, if not caused, all the evils they had recapitulated:—"You have banished my best friends, and slain my wisest counsellors, and now what can I do to deliver you?"

But misfortune had taught the people of Ghent their own errors, and the excellence of her they had so basely outraged. The news that the Archduke of Austria, the long betrothed husband and the favoured lover of Mary of Burgundy, was advancing with rapid steps towards Ghent, spread as much joy through the city as if the tidings had been of some personal good fortune to each individual citizen. The gates of Ghent were now no longer guarded, except against the common enemy. The Duke of Cleves quitted the city in haste; and joy and satisfaction spread through all ranks when the cavalcade which escorted the archduke wound on towards the palace. It was remarked, however, that nearly five

hundred of the horsemen that accompanied him—and those surpassing all the rest in military array and demeanour—were all adorned with a green scarf, while the banner that floated over them bore the arms of Hannut—argent, a green tree proper; and that the knight who led this band of élite, though his beaver was now up, and his face exposed, was clothed from head to foot in the green armour of the Vert Gallant of Hannut.

Little more requires to be said. It is well known to every one how gladly Mary of Burgundy herself saw the arrival of Maximilian; and there is every reason to believe that the old chronicler spoke the truth when, in describing their first meeting, he said, "Si parfaicte liesse fut oncques logée en cœur de parfaict amant, elle fut trouvée ce jour en l'assemblement de ces deux jouvenceaux."

Nor did the heart of Hugh of Hannut beat less highly, when, standing beside his princely friend, he too claimed his fair bride, Alice of Imbercourt. Still, the dead were to be mourned, and many sorrows were to be forgotten; but they were sorrows which drew the hearts of the living closer together.

A gleam of sunshine shone out at last upon the days of the good old Lord of Hannut; and casting from him the studies which—fanciful or real—had soothed his griefs by occupying his mind, he passed his latter years in rejoicing over the recovery of so noble and so dear a son.

On the nineteenth of August, 1477, Mary of Burgundy gave her hand to Maximilian of Austria; and the rich territories which so many princes had coveted, and for which France had played so base and subtle a game, passed away into another house. The years of that fair princess herself were few; but when she gazed smiling upon her husband and her children, she was wont to thank God that she had not looked into that fatal book, which might have given her an insight into her future destiny; and that in the happiness of the present she could see no ill to be anticipated for the future.

Alice of Imbercourt, soon after her marriage, retired from the city to the dwelling of her husband's father; and though her deep affection for Mary of Burgundy still continued unabated, she never more made the court her abode.

When, at length, the fatal accident happened which caused the death of her fair foster-sister, she flew eagerly to sooth her couch of sickness; but she never entertained, for a moment, those hopes of her recovery which all the others around indulged for several days.—She it was who prepared the mind of the archduke for the death of her he loved. She closed her eyes, and then returned to her own dwelling, and resumed the duties of her station.

The people of the country declared that Alice was not surprised by the event which had occurred, being forewarned by the previous knowledge of the future which she had obtained; and the old writers assert, most seriously, that the horoscope of Mary of Burgundy, as it was drawn at her birth, was fulfilled to the most minute particular. As no one, however, saw this horoscope but Alice of Imbercourt,—at least, before the latter events of Mary's life took place,—and as Alice carefully abstained from ever mentioning the subject, it is more than probable that the love of the marvellous, so prevalent in those days, adapted the prediction to the facts long after they occurred.

THE END.

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